



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



TUESDAY — 1 MAR 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	03/01 US delegation arrives in Taiwan
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-us-attempts-support-taiwan-will-be-futile-2022-03-01/
GIST	<p>TAIPEI/BEIJING, March 1 (Reuters) - A delegation of former senior U.S. defence and security officials sent by President Joe Biden arrived in Taipei on Tuesday on a visit denounced by China and happening in the midst of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The visit, led by one-time chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen, comes at a time when Taiwan has stepped up its alert level, wary of China taking advantage of a distracted West to move against it.</p> <p>Beijing claims the democratically governed island as its own and has vowed to bring it under Chinese control, by force if necessary.</p> <p>Mullen, a retired Navy admiral who served as the top U.S. military officer under former presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, is being accompanied by Meghan O'Sullivan, a former deputy national security adviser under Bush, and Michele Flournoy, a former undersecretary of defense under Obama.</p> <p>Two former National Security Council senior directors for Asia, Mike Green and Evan Medeiros, are also on the trip, which is intended to "demonstrate our continued robust support for Taiwan," a U.S. official told Reuters.</p> <p>The group touched down in a private jet at Taipei's downtown Songshan airport and were met by Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu.</p> <p>They will meet President Tsai Ing-wen on Wednesday, the same day former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will also arrive, though he is coming separately and as a private citizen.</p> <p>China describes Taiwan as the most sensitive and important issue in its ties with the United States, and any high-level interactions upset Beijing.</p> <p>"The will of the Chinese people to defend our country's sovereignty and territorial integrity is immovable. Whoever United States sends to show support for Taiwan is bound to fail," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said of the visit.</p> <p>Taiwan Premier Su Tseng-chang told reporters earlier on Tuesday that the trip showed "the importance both of the Taiwan-U.S. relationship and Taiwan's position" as well as the staunch U.S. support for the island.</p> <p>"It's a very good thing," he added.</p> <p>Their flight, from Washington via Anchorage, made an unusual arrival, flying down Japan's Ryukyu Islands before turning to approach Taipei from Taiwan's northeast coast and well away from China, data from flight tracking website FlightRadar24 showed.</p> <p>The more normal approach path for their direction of travel is over the East China Sea.</p> <p>On Saturday, a U.S. warship sailed through the sensitive Taiwan Strait, part of what the U.S. military calls routine activity but which China described as "provocative".</p> <p>Wang went further on Tuesday, using even stronger terms.</p> <p>"If United States is trying to threaten and pressure China with this then we need to tell them that in the face of the Great Wall of steel forged by 1.4 billion Chinese people, any military deterrence is but scrap metal," he said.</p>

	"The gimmick of having a U.S. warship sail through the Taiwan Strait should be left to those who foolishly believe in hegemony."
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HEADLINE	03/01 More supply chain pain: airspace closures
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/finance/streettalk/supply-chain-airspace-closures-russia-invasion-of-ukraine/2022/03/01/id/1059010/
GIST	<p>Global supply chains, already hit hard by the pandemic, face new disruption and cost pressure as airspace bans following Russia's invasion of Ukraine raise concerns over a fifth of air freight.</p> <p>Transport between Europe and north Asian destinations like Japan, South Korea and China is in the front line of disruption after reciprocal bans barred European carriers from flying over Siberia and prevented Russian airlines from flying to Europe.</p> <p>Airlines responsible for moving around 20% of the world's air cargo are affected by those bans, Frederic Horst, managing director of Cargo Facts Consulting, told Reuters on Tuesday.</p> <p>Germany's Lufthansa, Air France KLM, Finnair and Virgin Atlantic have already canceled north Asian cargo flights over closed access to airspace.</p> <p>Major Asian carriers like Korean Air Lines and Japan's ANA Holdings are still using Russian airspace, however, as are Middle Eastern airlines.</p> <p>Shares in German logistics firm Deutsche Post fell almost 3% on Tuesday. Major airline shares fell around 1%.</p> <p>Pure cargo carriers like Russia's AirBridgeCargo Airlines and Luxembourg's Cargolux are subject to the bans in a move that could send air freight rates - already elevated due to a lack of passenger capacity during the pandemic - soaring further.</p> <p>"The flights become more expensive due to the longer routes" said Stefan Maichl, analyst at Germany's Landesbank Baden-Wuerttemberg.</p> <p>"With more kerosene on board, the cargo capacity decreases. Freight rates could increase further as a result. "</p> <p>In December, air cargo rates were 150% above 2019 levels, according to the International Air Transport Association, spurring inflation that has rocked economies around the world.</p> <p>Sanctions imposed on Russia in the wake of its Ukraine invasion are expected to further disrupt global supply chains.</p> <p>Russia's AirBridgeCargo alone moves just under 4% of global international air cargo, with most of that between Europe and Asia, Horst said.</p> <p>"All up you could be looking at perhaps a quarter of air cargo between Asia and Europe needing to find alternate means of transportation," Horst said.</p> <p>"Yields are high enough that flying a longer route via Southeast Asia, South Asia or the Middle East is an option, but it will still pull capacity out of the market."</p> <p>E-commerce surged during the pandemic. Shipping container shortages and port bottlenecks led to more products being flown by air. Demand for air cargo last year was 6.9% above 2019 levels, according to IATA.</p>

	<p>Taiwan's EVA Airways said on Tuesday its cargo flights to and from Europe were operating normally and it would consider adding more services to meet market demand.</p> <p>China Airlines, also based in Taiwan, said it would continue to pay attention to the global economic and political situation and flexibly adjust cargo capacity.</p> <p>Asia-North America cargo routes are expected to be less affected than European routes, analysts say, because many carriers already use Anchorage, Alaska, as a cargo hub and stopover point.</p> <p>Japanese automakers Toyota Motor Corp and Nissan Motor Co said on Tuesday they were keeping an eye on any disruption to supply chains as a result of what Russia calls its "special operation" in Ukraine.</p> <p>U.S.-based United Parcel Service Inc and FedEx Corp., two of the world's largest logistics companies, have halted deliveries to Russia. Deutsche Post said its DHL unit was halting inbound shipments to Russia.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/01 Russia pummels Kharkiv
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-united-nations-general-assembly-kyiv-business-europe-abc3e297725e57e6052529d844b5ee2f
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian strikes pounded the central square in Ukraine’s second-largest city and other civilian targets Tuesday and a 40-mile convoy of tanks and other vehicles threatened the capital. Ukraine’s embattled president accused Moscow of resorting to terror tactics to press Europe’s largest ground war in generations.</p> <p>With the Kremlin increasingly isolated by tough economic sanctions that have tanked the ruble currency, Russian troops advanced on Ukraine’s two biggest cities on Day 6 of an invasion that has shaken the 21st century world order.</p> <p>In Kharkiv, a strategic eastern city with a population of about 1.5 million, at least six people were killed when the region’s Soviet-era administrative building was hit. Explosions tore through residential areas, and a maternity ward relocated to an underground shelter.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the targeted attack on Kharkiv’s main square “frank, undisguised terror,” blaming a Russian missile and calling it a war crime. “Nobody will forgive. Nobody will forget. ... This is state terrorism of the Russian Federation.”</p> <p>In an emotional appeal to the European Parliament later, Zelenskyy said: “We are fighting also to be equal members of Europe. I believe that today we are showing everybody that is what we are ... We have proven that, as a minimum, we are the same as you.”</p> <p>In addition to the strikes on cities, reports have emerged that Moscow has used cluster bombs on three populated areas. If confirmed, that would represent a worrying new level of brutality in the war — and could lead to even further isolation in Russia.</p> <p>Already, with Western powers sending weapons to Ukraine and driving a global squeeze of Russia’s economy, President Vladimir Putin’s options have diminished as he seeks to redraw the global map — and pull Ukraine’s western-leaning democracy back into Moscow’s orbit.</p> <p>The Kremlin denied Tuesday that it has used such munitions and insisted again that its forces only have struck military targets — despite evidence documented by AP reporters of shelling of homes, schools and hospitals.</p> <p>Unbowed by Western condemnation, Russian officials upped their threats of escalation — days after raising the specter of a nuclear attack. The Russian defense minister vowed Tuesday to press the offensive</p>

until it achieves its goals, while a top Kremlin official warned that the West's "economic war" against Russia could turn into a "real one."

A first round of talks Monday between Ukraine and Russia yielded no stop in the fighting, though both sides agreed to another meeting in coming days.

Throughout the country, many Ukrainian civilians spent another night huddled in shelters, basements or corridors. More than a half-million people have fled the country, and the U.N. human rights office said Tuesday that it has recorded the deaths of 136 civilians, including 13 children. The real toll is likely far higher.

"It is a nightmare, and it seizes you from the inside very strongly. This cannot be explained with words," said Kharkiv resident Ekaterina Babenko, taking shelter in a basement with neighbors for a fifth straight day. "We have small children, elderly people and frankly speaking it is very frightening."

A Ukrainian military official said Belarusian troops joined the war Tuesday in the Chernihiv region, without providing details. But just before that, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said his country had no plans to join the fight.

The precision bombing of Kharkiv's Freedom Square — Ukraine's largest plaza, and the nucleus of public life for the city — was a turning point for many Ukrainians, brazen evidence that the Russian invasion wasn't just about hitting military targets but also about breaking their spirits.

The strike blew out or shattered windows and walls of buildings that ring the massive central square, which was piled high with debris and dust. Inside one building, chunks of plaster were scattered, and doors, ripped from their hinges, lay across hallways.

"People are under the ruins, we have pulled out bodies," said Yevhen Vasylenko, representative of the Emergency Situations Ministry in Kharkiv region. In addition to the six killed, he said 20 were wounded in the strike.

Regional administration chief Oleh Sinehubov said that at least 11 people were killed and scores of others were wounded the day before, during Monday's shelling of the city.

One after the other, explosions burst through a residential area of Kharkiv in one video verified by AP. In the background, a man pleaded with a woman to leave, and a woman cried.

Determined for life to go on despite the attacks, hospital workers transferred a Kharkiv maternity ward to a bomb shelter. Amid makeshift electrical sockets and mattresses piled up against the walls, pregnant women paced the crowded space, accompanied by the cries of dozens of newborns.

Russia's goals in hitting central Kharkiv were not immediately clear. Western officials speculated that it is trying to pull in Ukrainian forces to defend the city while a larger Russian force encircles Kyiv. They believe Putin's overall goal is to overthrow the Ukrainian government and install a friendly one.

Zelenskyy said Russia was using the strikes to put pressure on his government. He did not offer details of the talks between Ukrainian and Russian envoys, but he said Monday night that Kyiv was not prepared to make concessions "when one side is hitting another with rocket artillery."

Meanwhile, Russian troops advanced toward Kyiv, a city of nearly 3 million. The convoy of armored vehicles, tanks, artillery and support vehicles was 25 kilometers (17 miles) from the center of the city and stretched about 65 kilometers (40 miles), according to satellite imagery from Maxar Technologies.

In a worrying development, Human Rights Watch has said it documented a cluster bomb attack outside a hospital in Ukraine's east in recent days. Local residents have also reported the use of the munitions in

Kharkiv and the village of Kiyanka near the northern city of Chernihiv, though there was no independent confirmation.

The International Criminal Court chief prosecutor has said he plans to open a Ukraine investigation and is monitoring the conflict.

Flames shot up from a military base northeast of Kyiv, in the suburb of Brovary, in footage taken from a car driving past. In another video verified by AP, a passenger pleads with the driver, “Misha, we need to drive quickly as they’ll strike again.”

And Ukrainian authorities released details and photos of an attack Sunday on a military base in Okhtyrka, a city between Kharkiv and Kyiv, saying more than 70 Ukrainian soldiers were killed along with some local residents. The attack could not be immediately confirmed.

The Russian military’s movements have been stalled by fierce resistance on the ground and a surprising inability to dominate Ukraine’s airspace.

Ukrainians used resourcefulness to try to stop the Russian advance: On a highway between Odesa and Mykolaiv in southern Ukraine, residents piled tractor tires filled with sand and topped with sandbags to block Russian military convoys. In Kyiv, sandbags were heaped in front of doors and windows of City Hall.

In the face of that Ukrainian resistance and crippling Western sanctions, Putin has put Russia’s nuclear forces on high alert — including intercontinental ballistic missiles and long-range bombers — in a stark warning to the West and a signal of his readiness to escalate the tensions to a terrifying new level. But a senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States had yet to see any appreciable change in Russia’s nuclear posture.

Western nations have increased weapons shipments to Ukraine to help its forces defend themselves — but have so far ruled out sending in troops.

As far-reaching Western sanctions on Russian banks and other institutions took hold, the ruble plummeted, and Russia’s Central Bank scrambled to shore it up, as did Putin, signing a decree restricting foreign currency.

But that did little to calm Russian fears. In Moscow, people lined up to withdraw cash as the sanctions threatened to drive up prices and reduce the standard of living for millions of ordinary people.

The economic sanctions, ordered by the U.S. and other allies, were just one contributor to Russia’s growing status as a pariah country.

Russian airliners are banned from European airspace, Russian media is restricted in some countries, and some high-tech products can no longer be exported to the country. International sports bodies moved to exclude Russian athletes — in the latest blow Tuesday, Russians were barred from international ice skating events.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Europe overhauls relationship w/Russia
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/in-just-72-hours-europe-overhauled-its-entire-post-cold-war-relationship-with-russia/ar-AAUrkjS
GIST	Just last week, many European countries were still so somnolent about the threat Russia posed to Ukraine that Germany’s spy chief was caught unawares in Kyiv when the Kremlin invasion started. He had to be extracted in a special operation.

But over just a handful of days, Europe has been shocked out of a post-Cold War era — and state of mind — in which it left many of the democratic world's most burning security problems to the United States.

The continent has in some ways leapfrogged the United States, which — though many policymakers credit the Biden administration for helping to coordinate — wasn't prepared for the speed of the European change. And it has been dizzying for some of the continent's Russia hawks, especially those in Eastern Europe who campaigned for tougher measures against the Kremlin for years but were ignored by bigger countries including Germany, Italy and France.

That's how it felt to Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics, who sat down in his office in the Latvian capital of Riga late Sunday to take part in a video conference with fellow European Union foreign ministers. On the call they agreed to another round of sanctions that days prior would have been unimaginable. They included banning Russian state media in the E.U., [harsh sanctions on Russian banks](#), and even using E.U. funds to pay for countries' shipments of weaponry to Ukraine — a step so outside the ordinary operations of the 27-nation bloc that some policymakers didn't realize it was an option.

"Right now I'm taking part in the E.U. foreign affairs council, feeling like the show 'The Visible is the Unbelievable,' " a long-running Russian popular science program, Rinkevics [wrote on Twitter](#), posting a photo of his computer screen showing a checkerboard of small video images of foreign ministers. "We're deciding on things that seemed unbelievable a week ago."

The countries taking action against Russia stretch around the world. Japan announced on Monday that it, like other countries, will [impose sanctions](#) on Russia's central bank and on senior officials in Belarus. Australia meanwhile said it [would sanction Russian President Vladimir Putin](#) and other senior Russian leaders and would supply weaponry to Ukraine.

But no region other than Europe has [overturned its foreign policy orthodoxies](#) in a heartbeat. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared he would vastly increase his country's defense spending and [start shipping arms to Ukraine](#). A top leader of the German Green party — which grew out of an anti-nuclear power movement decades ago — declared an [openness to keeping his country's nuclear plants operating](#) if it helped reduce reliance on Russian energy.

Eight member nations of the European Union said they wanted to start membership negotiations with Ukraine. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said she'd be open to it, and on Monday, [Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky](#) formally sent an application to Brussels.

"It's the end of an era," said former Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who was once dismissed by a Finnish leader as having "[post-Soviet stress](#)" for his hawkish approach to Russia.

"What you grew up in, the last 30 years, is over," he said he told a group of college students late last week. "We are somewhere else."

"The situation on the ground has led countries to understand neither Biden nor the East Europeans were crazy," Ilves said.

Finland and Sweden, who have long held themselves apart from NATO, are seriously considering joining the defense alliance. A poll published Monday by Finland's public broadcaster showed 53 percent of Finns favored membership. Even Switzerland, the mountainous redoubt of neutrality and hidden bank accounts, declared Monday it would freeze top Russians' assets.

During a six-hour meeting in Brussels on Thursday night that included [an emotional video call-in from Zelensky](#) that left some E.U. leaders in tears, the presidents and prime ministers even discussed the possibility of unilaterally halting the purchase of Russian oil and gas upon which they depend. That could force European factories to close for lack of power — and the leaders set aside the discussion for the time being. But that the idea was floated was a measure of Europe's new world.

Russia's invasion "is against the values Europe believes in," said Nathalie Tocci, the head of the Italian Institute of International Affairs and an adviser to the European Union's foreign policy chief. "We see the risk that it could possibly tip beyond Ukraine itself. Faced with a 1939 scenario, we'd be crazy not to change paradigm. What we don't know is whether it is sufficient. What is already crystal clear is that it's necessary."

Policymakers and analysts described a months-long campaign by the Biden administration to share intelligence briefings, pressure powerful countries that they might need to make sacrifices, and coordinate among a disparate group of 27 E.U. member states. Those countries range from the Russia-friendly — Hungary — to the Russia-fearful — many formerly Communist states — to those that have powerful business ties to Moscow, including Germany and Italy.

The Biden team negotiated economic measures and made countless phone calls to European officials. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Kyiv, Berlin, Riga and other European capitals.

The coalition that this week laid out unprecedented sanctions, the largest ever to target an economy of Russia's size, "did not emerge out of nowhere," said Ivo Daalder, a U.S. ambassador to NATO under former president Barack Obama who now heads the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs. "It had to be built."

As far back as November, Daalder said, European officials were reporting that the Biden administration was pressing them hard on the need to prepare a coordinated sanctions package they hoped, at the time, might deter Putin from acting.

While there were cracks as recently as earlier this month among countries' analysis — with the United Kingdom and United States for example predicting a major Russian assault and France and Germany taking a more skeptical view — those fissures disappeared when Putin moved into action.

Biden and Blinken "basically herded the cats, many of which were quite reluctant," Ilves said. "Otherwise you'd have a lot of people running around in all directions."

Doug Lute, who served as U.S. ambassador to NATO from 2013 to 2017, said American leadership was key in bringing NATO countries together to face a common threat.

Lute characterized Biden's attempt in recent months to orchestrate pressure on Russia and encourage countries with deeper ties to Russia to adopt a stronger stance as a "diplomatic surge," involving intelligence sharing, consultations on sanctions and more.

The last time NATO was as united as it is today was Sept. 12, 2001, when the alliance for the only time in its history invoked the Article V mutual defense clause in response to the terrorist attacks on the United States, Lute said.

A senior State Department official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly, said the Biden administration has sought as a guiding principle in its foreign policy to restore American engagement with the world. The official cited nearly five months of efforts by the administration to telegraph the threat it believed Russia posed in Ukraine and bring partners together in response.

"The fact you now have the world coming together, this didn't happen by accident," the official said. "This happened by dint of a lot of hard work."

After the Russian invasion last week, Scholz felt the country's path was clear, said his spokesman, Steffen Hebestreit.

Putin underestimated "the ability of Europe and the Western partners to show unity and resolve," Hebestreit said. "We have decided on major sanctions, probably some of the sharpest sanctions that have been decided upon in modern times against [a] state."

“The scales are falling from people’s eyes,” said Alexander Vershbow, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia and NATO deputy secretary general. “There are no more illusions or hopes about cooperating with Russia.”

The current moment might serve to alter the defense equation in Europe, adding gravity to Europeans’ sense of needing to protect themselves and potentially relieving the U.S. burden there if there is increased European spending and troop reinforcements on the continent. That would allow the United States to take up its long-planned shift toward Asia, said Vershbow, who is now a fellow at the Atlantic Council.

In the end, many said, Putin made the choice simple.

“Putin made us realize that we really are dependent on each other and that we have to close ranks, which is what we did,” said Hannah Neumann, a German Green member of the European Parliament. “I think Putin is surprised that we really did it. And I can tell you, we are also a bit surprised by the extent and speed with which we really did it.”

And others said the transformation will endure.

“We have to accept as Germans that we have to pay for our security in economic terms, that we can no longer hope for Pax Americana — that we can make our business with whoever we want, and somebody else will pay the economic price for our security,” said Franziska Brantner, a state secretary at the German Economy Ministry who was involved in her country’s shift on defense spending and weapons deliveries to Ukraine. “These days are over.”

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HEADLINE	02/28 Pandemic fears fade along w/omicron
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-pandemics-public-health-only-on-ap-eaaf9967f97089f6e869b08573c292b9
GIST	<p>Omicron is fading away, and so are Americans’ worries about COVID-19.</p> <p>As coronavirus pandemic case numbers, hospitalizations and deaths continue to plummet, fewer people now than in January say they are concerned that they will be infected after the rise and fall of the wildly contagious virus variant, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.</p> <p>Just 24% say they are “extremely” or “very” worried about themselves or a family member contracting COVID-19, down from 36% in both December and January, when omicron caused a massive spike in infections and taxed public health systems. Another 34% say they are somewhat worried. More than 140,000 deaths in the U.S. have been attributed to COVID-19 since omicron became the dominant strain of the coronavirus in mid-December.</p> <p>In Lincoln, Nebraska, trucking dispatcher Erica Martinez said she let down her guard last summer, before the deadly delta variant took hold, then “stopped doing a lot of the social stuff” when cases spiked again during successive waves of delta and omicron. Now, with virus numbers falling rapidly, she said she is more comfortable about socializing than she has been in months.</p> <p>“I feel like the country is desperately trying to recover from the last two years,” said Martinez, 36. “I think there will always be new variants popping up, left and right. I think, sadly, this is going to be the new norm for society,” with people taking fewer or more precautions as cases ebb and flow.</p> <p>That’s a widespread attitude; most Americans think the virus will stick around as a mild illness, according to a January AP-NORC poll. Just 15% think COVID-19 will largely be eliminated when the pandemic is over.</p>

Signs the nation is [ready to move on](#) from the biggest COVID-19 wave to date are everywhere. Statewide mask mandates have all but disappeared, and on Friday, [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) said it's no longer recommending indoor masking for most Americans, based on current data.

Cities are lifting vaccine requirements to enter bars, restaurants and entertainment venues. Companies are [bringing workers back](#) to the office. California said it's [taking an "endemic" approach](#) to the virus that leans on prevention and swift containment of outbreaks.

"I think it's reasonable and appropriate for people to live their lives a little more as the risk of infection goes down but to do it in a way that recognizes that, at some point, we're going to have another wave," said Dr. David Dowdy, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "And we're going to need to be willing to buckle down just a little bit in the future."

Worries about infection have dipped among both vaccinated and unvaccinated Americans. Still, roughly two-thirds of vaccinated Americans say they are at least somewhat worried about COVID-19 infection. About 4 in 10 unvaccinated Americans say the same.

Amie Adkins, of Gassaway, West Virginia, who is unvaccinated, said she was "surrounded" by omicron but never worried about getting it, counting on a mask and good hygiene to protect herself. Data shows unvaccinated people are at much higher risk for serious illness and death than people who got the shot.

"Even after all that, if we're going to get something, we're going to get it, and there's nothing we can do about. So there's no use worrying about it," said Adkins, a 43-year-old stay-at-home mom.

Public support for masking requirements also has ticked down, though Americans are still more likely to favor than oppose requiring masks in public, 50% to 28%, in the new poll. In August 2021, 55% were in favor. Support was much higher, at roughly three-quarters of the public, in 2020.

George Reeves, an 83-year-old semiretired electrical engineer in Raleigh, North Carolina, said his mask might soon come off.

"It's a risk-reward kind of thing," said Reeves, who is vaccinated. "There's some guesswork involved, but is it worth the hassle? Probably pretty soon it won't be worth the hassle of messing with masks."

More broadly, concern about the spread of infectious diseases as a threat to the U.S. has fallen sharply from a clear majority just six months ago, according to the poll.

About half of Americans now say they are "extremely" or "very" concerned about the threat posed by infectious diseases, down from roughly two-thirds in August. Still, only about 2 in 10 are not concerned. The current level of concern is similar to an AP-NORC poll in January 2019, well before [the global pandemic](#).

Dave Pitts, a computer engineer and college math and science tutor in Denver, is vaccinated, doesn't socialize much and wears a mask when he goes out, so he's not that worried about getting COVID-19. But Pitts — who spent three miserable weeks battling influenza in the 2009 H1N1 pandemic — predicts infectious disease will continue to pose a huge threat to the country.

He worries about a new, even deadlier variant of the coronavirus.

"I think we're in a better position now, but I think the minute spring break hits, we're going to see something worse show up," he said. "I think humanity's too dumb to be free of this just yet."

The U.S. is still reporting about 66,000 new, confirmed infections per day as the pandemic enters its third year.

	<p>In North Carolina, Reeves' restaurant gift certificates have been collecting dust for two years. He said that will soon change as the virus eases its grip.</p> <p>"After getting vaccinated, the probability of a bad result is really low. I'm reasonably well protected," he said.</p> <p>Martinez, the Nebraska transportation dispatcher, said she looks forward to "actually taking a vacation now, a vacation to try to feel as normal as possible. Maybe Mexico. Mexico sounds wonderful right now."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Europe welcomes refugees from Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/28/ukraine-refugees-europe/
GIST	<p>Nations in Europe are opening the door to a historic wave of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine, breaking with the continent's past resistance to asylum seekers from the Muslim world and Africa, and embracing hundreds of thousands of new arrivals who some leaders are hailing as culturally and ethnically European.</p> <p>The rapidly escalating Ukrainian wave — already more than 520,000 people, over the span of less than a week — appeared poised to dwarf the landmark European migrant crisis of 2015 and 2016, when 2 million people sought sanctuary, mostly Syrians fleeing civil war. Those arrivals sparked intense friction among European Union nations, fueled a resurgent movement of the far-right and led to backlash policies designed to stop or turn back asylum seekers.</p> <p>The solidarity of the current moment stands in stark contrast, particularly amid estimates that numbers could soar into the millions and potentially become the largest refugee wave on the continent of the post-World War II era.</p> <p>Some leaders have been unabashed about the dramatic shift in attitudes.</p> <p>"These are not the refugees we are used to ... these people are Europeans," Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov told journalists about the Ukrainians, as reported by the Associated Press. "These people are intelligent, they are educated people. ... This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists."</p> <p>"In other words," he added, "there is not a single European country now which is afraid of the current wave of refugees."</p> <p>Governments in the eastern and central parts of the continent that were once staunchly opposed to refugees have suddenly become some of the biggest supporters of an open-door policy — even as their welcoming stance appeared to be limited to Ukrainians.</p> <p>In the mid-2010s, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban built barbed-wire fences and established "border hunters" with 4x4s, night-vision goggles and migrant-sniffing dogs to halt arrivals of asylum seekers from an arc of instability from Africa to Afghanistan. On Sunday, he told journalists that "everyone fleeing Ukraine will find a friend in the Hungarian state."</p> <p>When Belarus began funneling Middle Eastern and Afghan asylum seekers toward Poland last year, Warsaw dispatched troops and pushed back migrants — some of whom froze to death in the woods. In recent days, however, Polish state railways have announced free travel for Ukrainians, and tons of aid have been donated by the public.</p> <p>Some of that disparity may be explained by the different push-factors at play. E.U. leaders said Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, under heavy sanctions, was trying to manufacture a crisis and destabilize the bloc by using migrants as pawns. Now, the E.U. has a shocking war happening right next door.</p>

“Eastern European countries see a chance to show unity with a neighbor and take a stand against Russian hostility,” said Hanne Beirens, the director of Migration Policy Institute Europe. Compared with 2015 and 2016, she said, “[Europe] is in a very different political situation, a very different political landscape.”

But in interviews with The Washington Post, several European officials were blunt that identity politics, too, are playing a role.

“Honestly, the sentiment is different since they are White and Christian,” said one European official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly.

The E.U. is opening its doors even as it remains reticent about granting Ukraine membership into its 27-nation club. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made a further appeal on Monday for “urgent accession.” So far, the E.U. has refused to assume the risk of helping defend Ukrainian territory from the long-present Russian threat or allow the free movement of 44 million people through the bloc.

But the brutality of the Russian invasion and the sheer number of displaced and fleeing Ukrainians, some argued, required a strong collective response — particularly as the struggle in Ukraine is rooted in the desire of its people to link with E.U. principles of democracy and human rights and shift away from Moscow’s authoritarian orbit.

And so the E.U., formed as a trade alliance, has taken the unprecedented step of financing the purchase and delivery of weapons to Ukraine. And E.U. leaders are expected to announce Thursday that they will allow Ukrainians to receive temporary protection for up to three years, potentially allowing them to work legally and access social services.

An emergency meeting of E.U. interior ministers achieved “solidarity among all E.U. states to jointly take in war refugees quickly and unbureaucratically,” German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said Sunday.

“I don’t know how many will come,” E.U. Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson said when asked about the scale of refugees she expects. “I think we will have to prepare for millions.”

Beirens said E.U. nations had an additional interest in supporting the measure, because it would free up asylum systems that otherwise would be choked with new Ukrainian applications. Europe, however, did not take similar steps in 2015 and 2016. Asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa have in many cases had to wait years in legal limbo, making it difficult to find jobs in the formal economy, while their claims were assessed.

So while refugee advocates have cheered the E.U.’s growing support for Ukrainian refugees, some have also bristled at how ethnicity, culture and religion appear to be driving the humanitarian response.

“For anyone who understands the liberal mind, please explain to me why the lives of Ukrainians are more precious than Haitians, Palestinians, Ethiopians, Afghans, Syrians, Iranians, Africans,” tweeted Ajamu Baraka, an American human rights activist. “Is it only the images of white suffering that moves them?”

Tarik Abou-Chadi, an associate professor in European politics at Oxford University, tried to explain it like this in an interview with The Post: “There’s the idea of a shared fate — ‘we could be next’ — and having a shared identity that stands against Russian imperialism. So this gives some people a different sense of community with others who are now fleeing. This might increase compassion for these Ukrainian refugees, compared to those from Syria.”

In interviews Thursday, several refugees and asylum seekers in Greece — a main arrival point for those fleeing the Middle East and African conflicts — said matter-of-factly that they weren’t surprised that Europe was approaching the current crisis differently.

A Nigerian in Athens, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fears to his safety, described following the news and empathizing with Ukrainians fleeing war.

“But, you know, a lot of people have been dying in Yemen,” he said. “And a lot of people have been dying in Ethiopia in horrible violence. Very little of that makes the news. Now it is Europe, and Europeans who are fleeing ... I hear people say, ‘All lives matter’ but no, they don’t all matter the same. Black lives matter less.”

Even as Europe welcomes Ukrainians, it is funding the Libyan coast guard to thwart migrants from crossing the Mediterranean to Italy. Greek security forces have been accused of pushing migrants back toward Turkish waters, in violation of international law. Those who do have the fortune of reaching Greek soil often wind up in a highly surveilled camp where they can live for more than a year.

Britain — which left the European Union in part because of a desire to “take back control” of its borders — signaled on Monday that it was willing to open the door to Ukrainians but only a crack. The offer is limited to the family members of British nationals. Home Secretary Priti Patel estimated that 100,000 Ukrainians would be able to “seek sanctuary,” provided they passed security checks.

Over the weekend, a Home Office minister tweeted — and then deleted — that there were “a number of routes” for Ukrainian refugees without family connections to come to Britain, including work visas that would allow them to pick seasonal fruit and vegetables.

The suggestion was met with widespread condemnation as inappropriate for the moment. “People are fleeing war in Europe, the like we haven’t seen in generations, in search of swift sanctuary,” wrote opposition Labour Party lawmaker Yvette Cooper.

Polls suggest Britain’s Conservative government is out of step with the public opinion, with the majority saying they’d support resettlement efforts for refugees. That was also the sense in south London on Sunday night, where Londoners turned up to a Polish community center to donate thousands of bags filled with clothes, medicines, diapers, sleeping bags — you name it — for fleeing Ukrainians.

“They are very vulnerable citizens. It would be ideal to see the U.K. open its doors,” said Dia Day, 19, a student who was lifting boxes of bedding into a van, destined for Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

On the continent, it remains unclear how long the warm welcome will last. In 2015, Germany’s then-chancellor, Angela Merkel, told her country “we can do it” and swung wide the doors of Europe’s largest economy to Syrians. Clusters of Germans turned out to welcome the new Muslim migrants with flowers and hugs at train stations.

But for many Germans, the welcome wore thin as refugee numbers continued to surge, migrant ranks were infiltrated by small numbers of trained terrorists, and the bills came due for financial aid. Merkel would later backtrack on her decision, one that would haunt her political career.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Foreign fighters sign up for Ukraine legion
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/akvyq4/russian-ukraine-invasion-foreign-fighters-battalion
GIST	<p>Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's extraordinary appeal for international volunteers to join the fight against the Russian invasion has generated thousands of expressions of interest from would-be foreign fighters, according to the Ukrainian government.</p> <p>On Sunday, Zelenskyy announced the establishment of an international legion for volunteers and encouraged people to join it. "This will be the key evidence of your support for our country," he said.</p> <p>Hanna Maliar, Ukraine's deputy minister of defence, said on Monday that her ministry had received "thousands" of requests from prospective international volunteers.</p>

Meanwhile, the head of a volunteer unit that will be receiving many of the foreign arrivals in Ukraine told VICE World News that about 400 international volunteers had signed up since Zelenskyy's call for support on Sunday.

Mamuka Mamulashvili is the leader of the Georgian National Legion, a volunteer unit formed by mostly Georgian soldiers that has attracted foreign fighters to Ukraine, including from many Western countries, since it was formed when war broke out in the Donbas region of Ukraine in 2014.

He told VICE World News that Zelenskyy's call for foreigners to come and join the ranks of a newly-formed "International Brigade" of Ukraine's armed forces had led to a surge of volunteers signing up to join the fight. Among those who had signed up since Zelenskyy's appeal were an estimated 70 from the UK and 50 from the US, he said.

In the prior three weeks of escalating aggression from Russia, about 200 foreign fighters had joined up, he said.

"They want to fight for freedom and they want to fight for democratic values," he said.

"It is not about anger. It is a normal human... act to help people that are being killed in the street, women and children."

Among the Westerners preparing to take up arms to defend Ukraine is Mark Ayres, a British ex-serviceman who previously spent three years volunteering for various Kurdish militias in Syria and Iraq, fighting enemies including the Islamic State group and Iranian-backed militias.

Ayres, who previously served four years with the Royal Green Jackets, two of those in Northern Ireland, told VICE World News that the situation in Ukraine was "pretty black and white."

"This invasion of Ukraine is very similar to the Nazis in World War II. Our government can't intervene militarily, but I have previous military experience and have been in combat."

He said it was a similar situation to that which had driven him to volunteer to fight the Islamic State.

"Daesh (ISIS) were committing the worst atrocities imaginable, and again our governments were doing nothing at the time," he said. "So, being ex-forces I thought I would go and volunteer."

The devastating footage of the Russian assault had done nothing to dissuade him from going, he said.

"I'm actually looking forward to it. Here I'm just some old git living in a rented room getting older. There I will be a soldier fighting for a people to be free," he said, adding that he had been inspired by the resistance put up by Ukrainians.

"I think the whole world has seen how the Ukrainians have fought one of the most powerful militaries in the world, with honour, spirit and balls," he said. "Not just the military but the civilians and the spirit of the nation is amazing to see on our TV screens."

While foreign volunteers have played a part in the Ukraine conflict since it began in 2014, and foreigners have been able to sign three-year contracts as volunteers in the Ukrainian armed forces since 2016, Zelenskyy's plea for international support, as his country fights a devastating invasion, has generated unprecedented interest from supporters around the world.

"This is the beginning of a war against Europe, against European structures, against democracy, against basic human rights, against a global order of law, rules, and peaceful coexistence," Zelenskyy said in a statement Sunday, which instructed potential volunteers to contact the defence attache of the Ukrainian embassies in their own countries.

“Anyone who wants to join the defence of Ukraine, Europe, and the world can come and fight side by side with the Ukrainians against the Russian war criminals.

On Reddit forums, users have spoken of their plans to sell their belongings and travel to join the fight, and one publication has even published an article explaining step-by-step how to sign up. BuzzFeed News reported on Sunday that a group of 10 Western special forces veterans – from the US, UK and Germany – were already in Poland and planning to cross into Ukraine.

The unusual plea for support has also created a question for Western governments over whether to allow their citizens to take up arms for another country. Countries including Canada, Denmark and Norway have indicated that volunteers will be allowed to join the fight. Slovakia’s prosecutor general has noted that it’s a crime for citizens to fight for a foreign army, while Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has warned his citizens not to go join the fight.

In the UK, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss’s comments on Sunday that she would “absolutely” support people volunteering to go and join Ukraine’s fight appeared to conflict with advice on her own department’s website, which states that people who travel to Ukraine to fight or help those in the conflict could be prosecuted, and [drew criticism](#) from with her own party that such a move would be illegal.

Ayres, the British volunteer planning to join the fight in Ukraine, said he was arrested every time he returned from his stints in the Middle East, although charges were always dropped.

“Each time I was questioned, my house was searched, electronics seized,” he said. “I understood the reasons. They had to make sure no war crimes were committed and other offences.”

Many of the foreign fighters headed for Ukraine will have interactions with the Georgian National Legion, the unit’s founder, Mamulashvili, told VICE World News.

The Georgian National Legion has previously operated as a frontline unit in the fighting in Donbas, but in recent years has acted as a waystation for foreign fighters from 27 countries coming to join the fight in Ukraine - providing them accommodation, food and training on their base while they went through the process to sign three-year contracts with the Ukrainian armed forces.

Mamulashvili said his unit would play this role for the new wave of foreign volunteers signing up to defend Ukraine, “because we were already organised in that direction and we were doing this through eight years of war.”

He said he had been personally speaking to those signing up, checking that they had legitimate military experience and were not right-wing extremists. “We do not tolerate it in the Georgian Legion,” he said.

In recent years Ukrainian authorities have been stepping up efforts to screen those coming to take up arms, amid concerns about right-wing extremists being drawn to the conflict, following major embarrassments. Chief among them was former US soldier Craig Lang, who was attached to the Georgian National Legion for a short time after serving with the far-right unit Right Sector. He has been charged with killing a Florida couple during a visit home in 2018, and is reportedly being investigated by the US Department of Justice for war crimes in Donbas, according to BuzzFeed News.

In another case, Ryan Burchfield, a US Marine-dropout and ex-member of the US neo-Nazi group The Base was deported by Ukrainian intelligence agents in late 2020.

Incidents like these have been seized upon by Russia, as they bolster a longstanding Kremlin smear that Ukraine is run by neo-Nazis, which President Vladimir Putin trotted out again in his attempts to justify the invasion.

Kacper Rękawek, a researcher on foreign fighters in Ukraine and author of the forthcoming book “Brown-Red Cocktail: Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine”, said that most media coverage on foreign

	<p>volunteers fighting for the Ukraine had focused on groups like Azov and Right Sector, due to the far-right ideology prevalent within those groups.</p> <p>Rękawek said that the media focus on extremist elements in the conflict has meant that the Georgian National Legion has received less attention than far-right units like Azov and Right Sector – but pointed out that it had been a major part of the foreign fighter landscape in Ukraine. The group probably had more Westerners pass through it than any other volunteer unit, he said.</p> <p>“That’s because they speak English, and they’re open - you can Facebook them, they haven't been banned from Facebook or places like that because they’re not nationalists,” he said. “It developed into a one stop shop for foreign volunteers coming to fight.”</p> <p>As for Ayres, the British volunteer planning to join the fight in Ukraine, he said he anticipated the conflict he would face would be on “a much larger scale” than anything he had encountered in the Middle East. But he was undaunted by the challenge.</p> <p>“I will stay as long as it takes,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/01 Ukrainians scramble to escape
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-russian-bombs-turn-kyiv-into-a-warzone-residents-scramble-to-escape-11646126841
GIST	<p>UZHGOROD, Ukraine—Vadym Osovsky, a 39-year-old Ukrainian, decided to leave Kyiv with his family on Friday after Russian rockets and paratroopers attacked a nearby military airport and a bridge leading into the city center was destroyed.</p> <p>Mr. Osovsky drove for more than 50 hours to the border with Slovakia.</p> <p>Since Ukraine’s government has banned men under 60 from leaving the country amid a general mobilization aimed at resisting the Russian invasion, Mr. Osovsky said goodbye to his family at the last checkpoint before their passports were stamped.</p> <p>For several minutes he hugged his wife, two daughters and son, gathering them together for a final photo.</p> <p>“Don’t worry! We’ll win,” he said as his family walked toward Slovakia.</p> <p>The Osovsky family is among the thousands of people to have fled Kyiv since the Russians invaded Ukraine last Thursday.</p> <p>Ukraine’s capital of Kyiv has suffered the brunt of the Russian assault on Ukraine, turning swaths of the ancient city of three million into a war zone and forcing thousands of residents to flee to Ukraine’s western borders.</p> <p>“We were hoping rockets, the artillery would stop, but it only got worse,” said Mr. Osovsky, who moved to Kyiv from an area in eastern Ukrainian that had been taken by pro-Russian militants in 2014. “I’ve already seen how this kind of war ends. War can end only very badly.”</p> <p>Since popular protests that ousted a pro-Russian president a decade ago and set the country on course toward westward integration, Kyiv has become a symbol of Ukraine’s defiance of Russian intimidation. But Russia’s attacks on the capital city—aimed at decapitating the pro-Western Ukrainian government—have left residents caught between a life-or-death choice between remaining in the city and escaping to safety.</p>

Like many among the city's young, Western-oriented business class, Oleksandra Papadyuk, 40, regularly attended the protests in Kyiv's Independence Square against efforts by then-President Viktor Yanukovich to bind Ukraine into tighter economic and political relations with Russia.

When those protests turned violent, ousting the widely unpopular president, she rejoiced. For eight years she watched as the city slowly became an Eastern European hub for business and culture.

Ms. Papadyuk woke up Thursday morning to the sound of Russian rockets pounding Kyiv's international airport. She gathered whatever clothes she could find, a toothbrush and some food and left the house in 15 minutes.

"When I was filling up the gas tank, I could feel the ground shake under my feet," she said.

Her trip to [the border with Slovakia](#) took nearly 72 hours by car, waiting for hours with her cousin, her cousin's nephew and her dog to reach the Uzhgorod border crossing.

"For the first two hours, I was in complete denial. I told myself I was going for a car ride," Ms. Papadyuk said, fighting tears. "I never thought Russia could do this."

For many, even after leaving the city, the trip was fraught with danger. Abandoned cars littered the median strip of the main roads out of Kyiv after breaking down or running out of gas. People were standing on the side of the road trying to hitch a ride west, said others who made the trip.

Amid the jam of vehicles leaving the city center, traffic moved at five to 10 miles an hour for long parts of the day. Lines at gas stations snaked hundreds of meters along the road, and motorists sped west down eastward-bound lanes, dodging armored vehicles and trucks hauling surface-to-air rockets toward the city. Shops were closed, and people rode bikes or walked on the roads leading west.

Since the first wave of evacuees left the city, violence has intensified in Kyiv. Over the weekend an explosion carved a crater in the ground at the base of a 10-floor apartment block and blasted through scores of apartments, blowing out windows on either side. The windows of a kindergarten 50 yards from the blast were also shattered.

Manel Khaled, 23, who moved to Kyiv from Morocco to become a pharmacist, said that on Saturday morning, she decided to flee.

"At one point, they stopped just attacking military targets, but civilian targets, like right next to our dormitory," she said. "My heart aches for the people staying there."

Olena Sturrock, who left Kyiv before the violence began, said her mother is still in the city and that she has tired of going up and down the stairs to the bomb shelter in the basement of her building.

She talks to her daily by phone. But over the weekend her mother said a last goodbye, just in case.

"I love you very much," her mother said. Ms. Sturrock told her she will be fine and they will all be together when it is over.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Sanctions cut Russia economy from world
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-ruble-financial-markets-are-hammered-by-sanctions-11646038133
GIST	Western nations dropped economic sanctions of historic scale on Russia that are hobbling its financial system and effectively reversing 30 years of post-Cold War engagement.

The economic moves by the U.S. and Europe, in response to the invasion of Ukraine, reverberated Monday through Russia's economy, which was largely cut off from much of the West, and hindered the ability of [Russia's central bank](#) to manage the country's financial system and mitigate the damage.

Western banks and businesses added to the governments' actions by [halting operations in Russia](#) and sales to Russian companies. Many cited the risks of potentially violating sanctions. More broadly, businesses prize stability, and invasions create chaos.

In just days, Russia has been all-but-unplugged from a global system that powered its transition from a closed, government-controlled economy to a more modern one that yielded Western goods, foreign travel and a middle-class lifestyle.

"Today, Russia's financial system and economy are facing a totally abnormal situation," the usually reserved Bank of Russia Gov. Elvira Nabiullina, dressed in black, said Monday.

The impact hit Russian stock, bond and currency markets. Its central bank shut the stock market, avoiding an expected selloff, and raised benchmark interest rates to 20% from 9.5%, to make holding the ruble more attractive and cushion its expected fall.

The ruble fell to 108.014 to the U.S. dollar from 83 on Friday—a drop of more than 20% and its worst one-day decline since Sept. 3, 1998. Shares of several large Russian companies traded in London and they fell as well. [Sberbank](#), the country's largest lender, was down 74%. The bank was sanctioned by Western nations. The country's energy giants also got hit, with [Gazprom](#) falling almost 53% and [Rosneft](#) declining 42%. The central bank said the Russian stock market would remain closed Tuesday.

Russia imposed capital controls, blocking residents from sending money to foreign bank accounts and restricting payments on offshore debt. On the streets, Russians on Monday lined up at ATMs to take out cash.

The speed and breadth of the sanctions overwhelmed years of preparation by Russia after the 2014 sanctions. In a strategy dubbed Fortress Russia, the country built up more than \$600 billion in foreign reserves, bought gold and pivoted some exports to China. Closing off Russia's access to those reserves undercut the strategy, a fact acknowledged by Ms. Nabiullina, the central bank chief.

Timothy Ash, an emerging-market strategist at BlueBay Asset Management, wrote in a note to clients Monday: "From Fortress Russia to Rubble Russia in a week."

The latest round of sanctions are likely to cause a sizable contraction for Russia's economy this year, and could prompt bank runs and higher interest rates as the Russian ruble depreciates, according to the Institute for International Finance, a Washington-based global association of financial firms.

Elina Ribakova, deputy chief economist at the IIF, said Monday she expected sanctions to bring about a contraction of at least 10% in Russia's gross domestic product along with double-digit inflation.

"The pressure on the Russian economy is just tremendous," said Janis Kluge, an expert on the Russian economy at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. "And it's going to get even more dramatic over the next weeks and months."

Even before Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#)'s decision to invade Ukraine, Russia's central bank had difficulty bringing inflation under control. In January, the inflation rate stood at 8.7%, more than double the central bank's target, despite a series of interest rate increases that began last March.

Boris Titov, Mr. Putin's business ombudsman, criticized the central bank's rate increase Monday, saying in an Instagram post that it chose to "further strangle" Russian businesses that are already "at the front-line" of sanctions.

Fall back

The plunging ruble and ATM cash lines offered echoes of Russia's financial implosion two decades ago, which set the stage for Mr. Putin's rise to power.

In August 1998, with revenues from oil and gas weakening, the government ran out of money. It devalued the ruble and suspended payments on its debts, leading to the collapse of the banking system. Russians lost their savings, while others saw their standard of living fall to inflation and scarcity.

Mr. Putin's popularity in the early years of his long stretch as Russia's leader grew in large part from the stabilization of the economy, which benefited from rising oil and gas exports.

Russia, the world's 11th-largest economy, is smaller than South Korea, and pales in economic heft compared with the U.S. or China.

Sanctions in the long-term could reverse years of slow progress to diversify its economy—one of the world's largest suppliers of natural gas and oil—to a more service-based system. The oil-and-gas sector accounts for around half of Russia's exports of goods but no more than a fifth of GDP and as much as 5% of employment, according to ING Bank.

Russia has a vibrant tech sector with innovative companies deeply enmeshed with the global economy. Analysts say many won't be able to do business with Western counterparts or have access to international supply chains. Some may be simply shunned outside of their country.

Sanctions on semiconductor chips have cut off much of Russia's tech and manufacturing industries. The country has only a few, mostly outdated semiconductor factories and is dependent on parts and patents from Western companies.

Jumping ship

Yevgeny Bykov, who owns a company that distributes components for electronic devices, said sanctions have grounded his business. The company, called Promelektronika and based in the industrial city of Yekaterinburg, buys its products mostly from European subsidiaries of U.S. electronics distributors. Those enterprises have stopped selling to his company, he said.

Mr. Bykov had prepared for possible sanctions, he said, and had more than \$2 million in foreign reserves at Sovcombank. But the institution was included in the latest round of U.S. sanctions, and he can't access his funds.

"We've had a lot of crises in the 30 years since I started this company," he said, ticking off the Russian debt default of 1998, the global financial crisis of 2009, and the sanctions imposed on Russia after its annexation of Crimea in 2014. He doesn't see any easy way out of this one.

Ivan Vinogradov, who runs a company in St. Petersburg that sells German-made windows, said his partners in Germany haven't substantially raised the price of imports, and he doubts his bottom line will be affected. He conducts much of his trade in cash, he said, and isn't greatly exposed to the sanction troubles at banks.

"Maybe we haven't seen the real effects yet," he said of Western sanctions. "Though if they close our access to deliveries, then we'll be in trouble."

Mr. Putin has limited tools to strike back financially at the West. On Monday, he issued restrictions on foreign exchange loans and transfers by Russian residents abroad, part of a package of retaliatory measures.

Short of Russia disrupting the global commodity trade, a step that would wreck its own economy, analysts don't expect significant consequences from Russia's counter sanctions announced so far. Besides oil and

gas, Russia is a major exporter of metals and coal, but there are few signs so far that it would curtail that trade.

The scale of Western sanctions, however, has raised concerns about their effect on the global economy, U.S. sanctions experts said. Oil prices have jumped over the conflict in Ukraine, which will push up prices at the pump in the U.S. and elsewhere. The threat of rising prices adds to the challenges from high inflation already facing businesses and central banks. Any disruption of Russian commodity and raw materials exports also could worsen the strained global supply chain for semiconductors.

There is also the potential for the escalation of counter-sanctions by Russia. European companies and banks are reconsidering their operations there and looking to sell or write down the value of their holdings.

BP PLC said Sunday it would sell its stake of almost 20% in Russian oil producer Rosneft. Norway's sovereign-wealth fund said it would look to quit around \$3 billion in Russian holdings, which represent a sliver of the fund's \$1.3 trillion in assets. Daimler Truck Holding AG said it would stop sending components, and Volvo Car AB said it would halt business in Russia.

The impact of the sanctions on Russia will likely be long lasting, even if they don't stay in place for long. For all but a few companies, the country isn't a big part of their business. If they pull back there is no rush to return.

Some parts of the top echelon of the Russian business community are already starting to complain.

Russian metals tycoon Oleg Deripaska said it was time to put an end to "all this state capitalism" and change policies in Russia. "This is the first test of who actually will be responsible for this banquet," he wrote on his Telegram channel. "I really want clarifications and intelligible comments on the economic policy of the next three months."

Another billionaire, banker Oleg Tinkov, spoke out against the war, calling it unthinkable and unacceptable.

"States should be spending money on treating people, on research to defeat cancer, and not on war," he said on Instagram. "We are against this war!"

The last drawbridge of Fortress Russia is China and it isn't clear it will hold.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that Russia "of course" has its friends. "Look at the reaction of the world's giants. Those who do not pretend to be giants, but real giants. In particular, China."

Analysts say China might not be willing to prop up the Russian economy if it means jeopardizing its already fraught trade relations with the West.

Banking executives say the default position of Chinese banks is to comply with U.S. sanctions.

There also might be little China can do. While the energy trade between Moscow and Beijing has been growing, the bulk of Russia's oil and gas goes to Europe. There is no quick way for Russia to redirect gas.

China meanwhile can't easily replace U.S. chips and computers because the country doesn't have the same level of technology, and some of its companies are already under sanctions.

"What Russia did in the last few years was basically build buffers that are suited to defend against the kinds of sanctions that came in 2014," Mr. Kluge said. "But against the sanctions that have come now, there's simply no proper defense."

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SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/companies-see-an-opening-for-office-reopening-11646130602?mod=hp_lead_pos3
GIST	<p>The office return is in motion.</p> <p>After two years of remote work, companies including American Express Co., Facebook parent Meta Platforms Inc. and Wells Fargo & Co. plan broader office reopenings in March. Many executives say they are uncertain about what the future may hold, but feel confident that offices can at least reopen this month as Omicron cases fall and health authorities loosen mask guidance.</p> <p>At this point in the pandemic, “we’re looking at moments,” said Francine Katsoudas, chief people officer at Cisco Systems Inc., which is reopening its U.S. offices on March 1. “This is a moment where our employees can come in.”</p> <p>Like many employers, Cisco had planned to reopen its offices far sooner. A small number of its U.S. employees returned last summer, and the company had scheduled a broader return for February of this year. That got pushed back too, following the nationwide surge of cases tied to the Omicron variant. A few weeks ago, Cisco’s medical director pointed to a steep drop in cases, and executives felt confident the company could safely convene, Ms. Katsoudas said.</p> <p>Should cases rise once more or other circumstances call for sending employees home, the company can adapt, she said. Cisco used to ask teams to map out their work schedules over the coming 90 days; Ms. Katsoudas said the company now considers that too long of a time horizon. Instead, she encourages teams to plan in 30-day increments.</p> <p>“If something changes, we know exactly how to navigate through that,” she said.</p> <p>Many companies, including Cisco, are leaving it up to teams and managers to determine when and how often employees come into the office. Bosses are preaching flexibility, careful not to alienate employees who have come to appreciate the upsides of remote work.</p> <p>To ease employees back into the rhythm of in-person work, American Express is soft opening its New York office on March 1. The company encourages employees in hybrid roles to commute and come into the office at least one day a week. It will begin what it calls its full “Amex Flex” program on March 15; many employees will work, on average, one to three days a week in an office, depending on their jobs and team arrangements, a spokeswoman said.</p> <p>“After a very long wait, it will be good for many of us to see each other again in person and enjoy the connections, collaboration, and variety in our daily routines,” Stephen J. Squeri, CEO and chairman of American Express, said in a memo to employees in February.</p> <p>The latest push to reopen reflects Covid-19’s retreat across the U.S. Many states and local governments have pulled back Covid-19 mitigation efforts in recent weeks, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week said masks aren’t necessary indoors where Covid-19 is circulating at low levels. New York City could lift its vaccine requirement for restaurants, fitness centers, and entertainment venues March 7, if current Covid-19 trends continue, Mayor Eric Adams said Sunday.</p> <p>Office attendance has ticked up recently, though it remains sparse in many places. In 10 major U.S. cities, offices were on average 36.4% occupied as of mid-February, up from about 33% earlier in the month, according to Kastle Systems, a security company that tracks how many people swipe into buildings. Some executives have noted that Americans seemed willing to go to sporting events, live theater performances and restaurants, while still avoiding the office.</p> <p>“People are certainly comfortable doing a lot of things in person, yet they’re not coming back to the office. So I do think the tight labor market is impacting business leaders’ willingness to be more aggressive about having their employees come back to work,” said Owen D. Thomas, CEO of office landlord Boston Properties Inc., on a call with analysts at the end of January.</p>

Improving health conditions, along with vaccinated workers, have given many executives confidence to push for a return. [Citigroup](#) Inc. [C -4.44%](#) recently asked its vaccinated employees at its U.S. offices that hadn't previously reopened to return at least two days a week beginning March 21. Many of its employees in cities like New York, Boston and Chicago returned last year. "Although Covid-19 may never fully go away, we are seeing promising developments. Cases are steadily decreasing across the U.S., and our vaccinated workers face less risk of serious illness from the virus," Sara Wechter, head of human resources at [Citi](#), said in a note on LinkedIn last week.

Citi said earlier this year that it had reached 99% compliance one day before a [January deadline the bank had set for U.S. workers to get vaccinated](#) or to request an accommodation for medical or religious reasons.

Executives at [Verizon Communications](#) Inc. told U.S. employees in recent weeks that those working in hybrid roles should try in-office returns in March, with the schedules set with their teams going into full effect in early April.

Those who study workplaces say there are benefits of bringing teams together, even if only occasionally. Fewer lunches, in-person meetings and after-hours drinks with colleagues from the office can come with a downside: weaker bonds between workers. When employees are less connected to their peers, they have an easier time changing jobs, something that worries companies, said Brian Kropp, who leads human-resources research at Gartner, an advisory and research firm.

"It's easier to quit because you're not quitting your friends," he said.

Though Mr. Kropp expects many white-collar employees to continue to work at home, since productivity has soared in the remote era, he said companies have an incentive to find ways to bring people together, even if that means a gathering [once a month or once a quarter](#).

"You have to create these intentional moments where you're building these social and emotional relationships," he said.

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HEADLINE	03/01 Russian invasion escalates
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/01/russia-ukraine-war-putin-news/
GIST	<p>Russian forces, frustrated by the tenacious defense of major cities by Ukrainian soldiers and ad hoc civilian militias, gathered menacing strength Tuesday, as a projectile appeared to strike near Kharkiv's administration building and a convoy of troops and artillery more than 40 miles long approached Kyiv.</p> <p>The Russian force, under the command of a president whose country become an international political and economic pariah with astonishing speed, is apparently girding itself to encircle Kyiv, according to a senior U.S. defense official, fueling concerns that the Kremlin will adopt the same siege tactics that are beginning to strangle Kharkiv.</p> <p>There, thousands are without power and heat in freezing temperatures, local officials said, and residents were bracing for more shelling on Tuesday. Suspected cluster munitions struck residential parts of Kharkiv on Monday, raising fears that as Russia escalates attacks in urban areas, it could use tactics similar to those it used in Chechnya and Syria, where it has been accused of wartime abuses. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the attack on civilian areas in Kharkiv amounted to a "war crime."</p> <p>Five hours of talks between Russian and Ukrainian delegations near Belarus's border on Monday failed to yield a breakthrough, with the two sides agreeing only to continue discussions in coming days. Russia's defense minister said Monday the invasion would continue until Russia met its goals.</p> <p>Here's what to know</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Russian advance toward Kyiv continues to be slowed by logistical challenges, British Defense Ministry analysts said Tuesday. Having failed to take control of Ukrainian airspace, Russia is shifting to nighttime operations to reduce its risk of losses, they said. • Ukraine has suffered 1,500 civilian and military casualties since the attack began, Biden administration officials told U.S. lawmakers on Monday, according to two people in the briefing. It was unclear whether the casualty count referred to fatalities or included those injured as well. • Russia is careening toward an economic crisis, with the value of the ruble plunging after several nations severed the Kremlin's access to its foreign currency reserves in the West and cut off some Russian banks from the international SWIFT financial messaging system. • Fissures appear to be forming between Russian President Vladimir Putin and members of the oligarch class, who made billions of dollars while showing fealty to the autocratic leader but now see their fortunes threatened by Western sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.
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HEADLINE	03/01 NASA space station partnership w/Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/01/space-station-nasa-russia/
GIST	<p>When he returns to Earth on March 30 aboard a Russian spacecraft alongside two Russian cosmonauts, NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei will have spent more time in space on a single mission than any other American, a total of 355 consecutive days. That's more than Christina Koch's 328-day mission, and more than Scott Kelly's 340 days.</p> <p>Inside the space agency, it is being celebrated as another milestone for one of NASA's most successful programs, the International Space Station, which for more than two decades has been a symbol of exploration and international collaboration.</p> <p>But now, as Russia continues its bloody invasion of Ukraine, the partnership has come under more strain than it has endured in years, and it is unclear how the countries will continue to work together in space, as tensions between the Cold War adversaries mount on the ground.</p> <p>Last week, after President Biden said that the sanctions against Russia would "degrade" its space program, Dmitry Rogozin, the head of Roscosmos, the Russian space agency, fired off tweets asking if the U.S. wanted to ruin the cooperation between the countries in running the space station. He reminded Biden that Russia is responsible for firing the thrusters that keep the station in the correct orbit, and threatened that without Russia, the station could come crashing down.</p> <p>NASA's response has been far less incendiary. It said it is continuing its normal spaceflight operations in partnership with Roscosmos "for ongoing safe operations." It said that "no changes are planned on the agency's support for ongoing in orbit and ground station operations."</p> <p>In a call with reporters Monday, Kathy Lueders, NASA's associate administrator for space operations said, "we are not getting any indications at a working level that our counterparts are not committed to ongoing operation on the International Space Station. We as a team are operating just like we were operating three weeks ago."</p> <p>She said NASA and its Russian counterparts "are still talking together. We're still doing training together. We're still working together. Obviously, we understand the global situation and where it is, but as a joint team, these teams are operating together."</p> <p>She added that, "obviously we need to continue to monitor the situation. ... We've operated in these kinds of situations before and both sides always operated very professionally and understand the importance of this fantastic mission and continuing to have peaceful relations between the two countries in space."</p> <p>NASA continues to work to fly Russian cosmonauts on American spacecraft, and American astronauts fly on the Russia Soyuz spacecraft, like the one that is expected to bring Vande Hei home in a few weeks, the NASA spokesperson said.</p>

The spacecraft is expected to land in Kazakhstan on the morning of March 30, and if NASA is conducting normal operations, as expected, it would have a team in place, including a flight doctor, ready to whisk Vande Hei home. Typically, NASA tries to return its astronauts to Houston as quickly as possible and has a helicopter ready near the landing site to take the astronaut to a nearby airport, from which the NASA team flies back to the United States on a NASA jet.

During his time on the station, Vande Hei, a retired Army colonel and an Iraq War veteran, has said he was “proud to be part of this team,” and helped support his [Russian colleagues during a spacewalk](#).

For years, Americans and Russians have worked side by side in space and on the ground. After the space shuttle was retired in 2011, NASA was dependent on Russia to fly its astronauts to and from the station. That dependence bound the space agencies even more closely together.

While in Kazakhstan, “we effectively operate as one team,” Kenny Todd, NASA’s former deputy space station program manager, [said during a NASA podcast in 2020](#). “Whether it’s European astronauts, or NASA astronauts, or Russian cosmonauts. everybody is acting as one. And again, it’s a wonderful partnership, and you really get to see it play out when you’re out in the field like that.”

But more recently, the geopolitical strains between the countries have begun to fray the relationship.

In 2019, then NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine was [forced to rescind an invitation](#) that he had offered Rogozin to visit the United States after some key senators blasted the move. Rogozin had been placed on the sanctions list in 2014 by the Obama administration in response to Russia’s military actions in Ukraine when he was deputy prime minister. After the sanctions were put in place, Rogozin said that Russia should stop flying [NASA’s astronauts and the United States should instead use “a trampoline.”](#)

While Rogozin is known for his bluster, “that was significant,” said Leroy Chiao, a former NASA astronaut who flew on the Soyuz. “It was the first time somebody in the space agency made some kind of reference to threatening the partnership.”

Still, he said that “cooler heads have got to prevail. It would be bad for Russia, too, to lose or compromise the ISS in any way.”

Scott Pace, the director of the Space Policy Institute at George Washington University who served as the executive secretary of the National Space Council in the Trump administration, told The Washington Post late last year that the partnership was delicate. The station “might be a high-water mark for U.S.-Russia relations. But it’s not invulnerable. ... If we were to start over today, we would not have the Russians as partners on the station. That was done in another, more hopeful, era.”

Bill Nelson, the current NASA administrator, has tried to keep an open dialogue with Rogozin and Roscosmos. But he strongly condemned [Russia after it blew up a dead satellite](#) last year, scattering hundreds of pieces of debris in orbit that threaten the space station. He called it “reckless and dangerous,” and said he was “outraged by this irresponsible and destabilizing action.”

Still, the Biden administration recently announced that despite the tensions with Russia, it wanted [to keep its partnership going](#) and extend the station’s life span from 2024 to 2030.

“As more and more nations are active in space, it’s more important than ever that the United States continues to lead the world in growing international alliances and [modeling rules and norms](#) for the peaceful and responsible use of space,” Nelson said at the time.

After the ISS, however, NASA isn’t looking to partner with Russia. Instead, it is working [with private sector companies](#) to develop commercial space stations.

HEADLINE	03/01 'Unprecedented' Australia floods; 10 dead
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/01/australia-new-south-wales-queensland-floods/
GIST	<p>MELBOURNE — Ten people have died, and thousands have been forced to evacuate their homes in eastern Australia as almost a week of torrential rain and record flooding have submerged houses, washed away construction cranes and smashed boats like toys.</p> <p>Flash floods had swept through 185 miles of Australia's coast across two states by Tuesday, with warnings in place for the most populated city, Sydney, as the country endures the final months of the La Niña weather pattern.</p> <p>Storms began at the Queensland town of Gympie on Feb. 22. They drenched coastal towns on the way to the city of Brisbane, which received 80 percent of its typical annual rainfall in three days.</p> <p>The nation has been living under a La Niña weather pattern since November, and it is predicted to ease over the coming months. La Niña ushered in a wetter, cooler summer Down Under. The same pattern, which originates with cyclical changes in the Pacific Ocean, causes a cool, wet winter in the northern United States and a warmer, drier one in the southern part of the country.</p> <p>In a climate outlook released Tuesday, Australia's Bureau of Meteorology said climate change continues to affect the country, including through increased rainfall during the wet season between October and April and a "greater proportion of rainfall from high-intensity short-duration rainfall events."</p> <p>Kelley Sheenan, editor in chief of the magazine Peppermint, watched social media helplessly at home with her coronavirus-positive son as water encroached on the magazine's Brisbane office. She rushed to the office alone in the middle of the night to carry computers one by one through ankle-deep water into her car.</p> <p>"I could feel the water getting higher on my legs each time, so I knew I had to stop as it was getting too scary," she said.</p> <p>"From what I can see, the water is almost at the roof, so I don't think anything will be salvageable," she said. "It doesn't seem real."</p> <p>As the flooding moved to her home, she said, she was told she shouldn't to go to an evacuation center because her son had covid and should call hospitals. She instead moved everything to the second story and waited it out, hoping for the best, until water levels receded.</p> <p>In typical Aussie fashion, some residents took advantage of the conditions for unusual sports. A Sunshine Coast bicycle rider was seen tearing through the floodwaters towing a child on a surfboard, and a swimmer was filmed completing a freestyle lap in a drowned football field. Elsewhere, world champion surfer Mick Fanning gave a pharmacist a lift on a Jet Ski between two towns so she could distribute medication.</p> <p>On Monday, the severe weather hit the city of Lismore in New South Wales, where it turned downtown blocks into swimming pools.</p> <p>Harrison Eyre, 20, a student, was one of many residents who took to flooded streets in "tinnies" — small aluminum boats — to assist. He said he helped perform about 20 rescues on Monday, including navigating the boat between cabins at a holiday park to reach an older woman waiting on top of a permanent trailer. He climbed onto a roof to save a Dachshund dog and watched helicopters pull people from rooftops using winches, he said.</p> <p>"At some places, the water was over the top of roofs of double-story houses," he said. "The State Emergency Service put a call out to all people with boats in the area to do what they could — get in the water and try and find people."</p>

	<p>New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet said on Tuesday the disaster was an “unprecedented event” beyond the scale of previous floods.</p> <p>Dan Clark, 36, a Little League coach, was reeling knowing the Lismore baseball field was under several feet of water after expensive renovations had just been completed. He said he spent Monday “holding my breath and waiting by the phone” for news of friends and family waiting on their roofs.</p> <p>He has lived in the region, prone to flooding, all his life. He said previous events were “not even close” to the record-breaking water levels he saw on Monday.</p> <p>The meteorology bureau warned Tuesday that the same region of Queensland was likely to be hit by severe thunderstorms with large hailstones, damaging winds and more heavy rainfall in the second half of the week. In New South Wales, it predicted, the rainstorm would continue south with flash-flooding possible in Sydney, coastal regions and as far as Victoria — the southernmost state on the east coast.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Blood tests: 140M have had coronavirus
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/02/28/covid-cases-nationwide/
GIST	<p>More than 140 million Americans have had the coronavirus, according to estimates from blood tests that reveal antibodies from infection — about double the rate regularly cited by national case counts.</p> <p>The estimates, compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, show that about 43 percent of the country has been infected by the virus. The study shows that the majority of children have also been infected.</p> <p>The data goes through late January, when the omicron variant of the coronavirus was causing more than 500,000 cases a day, meaning the number of Americans now infected is considerably higher. The data comes from 72,000 blood samples taken in January.</p> <p>The highly infectious variant has caused case counts to skyrocket. As of late November, just before the omicron variant began spreading in the United States, the blood test study estimated that 103 million people had been infected. By that measure, 37 million new people caught the virus over two months ending in late January.</p> <p>Every two weeks, the CDC gathers tens of thousands of blood tests analyzed by commercial labs nationwide for reasons unrelated to the coronavirus, such as checkups or other medical treatment. Those samples are also tested for coronavirus antibodies. The percentage of people with antibodies is known as seroprevalence.</p> <p>The blood test study includes infections throughout the pandemic but counts each person only once. Daily coronavirus case rates tally every known infection, so many people who have had reinfections are counted again and again. The estimated 140 million is well over double the number of people included in counts by The Washington Post or government agencies as of late January.</p> <p>The blood tests count only antibodies from natural infection, including asymptomatic cases, not from vaccination. The study measures the presence of antibodies. It does not indicate whether there is strong protection against subsequent infection.</p> <p>Infection rates are much higher for children and younger adults, the study found. It estimated that 58 percent of children up to age 11 have antibodies from natural infection, along with the same share of children age 12 to 17.</p> <p>Just under half of adults up to 49 have been infected, the CDC estimates. The rate drops to 37 percent for people 50 to 64 and 23 percent of people 65 or older.</p>

The coronavirus is much deadlier for older people. Half of the people [who have died of covid-19 have been age 75 or older](#). Vaccination and other preventive measures have been concentrated on the most vulnerable older people. Younger people have [much lower vaccination rates](#) and are much more likely to be working in jobs or attending school, where they risk exposure.

At least half of the population in 14 states has been infected, blood tests showed, from 56 percent in Wisconsin to half in Georgia. The other states with a majority infection rate, in descending order, are Iowa, Illinois, Ohio, Wyoming, Texas, Indiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Michigan, New Jersey, Tennessee and Louisiana. New York is just under that level, at 49 percent.

The lowest infection rate is in Vermont, with 18 percent. The next-lowest states in ascending order are Hawaii, Maine, Oregon, Washington, New Hampshire, Virginia and Massachusetts, which tops the lowest states with 37 percent. Nevada was not included in the study, and there was insufficient data for North Dakota, Arizona and Utah.

Initially, tests for seroprevalence that included both natural infection and vaccination could show whether the country was reaching a level of herd immunity to control spread of the disease. But protection from infection or vaccination is [strongest for about six months](#), the [CDC has found](#), after which the [risk of infection grows again](#). The delta and omicron variants — [spaced about six months apart](#) — both infected people who previously had the virus.

Just before the omicron variant, a seroprevalence study that included both vaccination and natural infection found antibodies in more than 90 percent of adults, but that did not prevent omicron's enormous infection rates, hospitalization and death, said Kristen Nordlund, a CDC spokeswoman.

Vaccination or exposure to the coronavirus may have reduced the deadliness and severity of the omicron wave, Nordlund said.

Scientists still can't explain why some people get the virus and others do not. A [CDC study of disease spread within households](#) during the omicron wave found that 53 percent of people in a household with an infected person also caught the virus. Vaccination, mask-wearing and isolation within the household all reduced transmission and protected other members of the household. But even in households without isolation, vaccination or mask-wearing, not everyone caught it.

Another study of seroprevalence that examined a community after a coronavirus wave also found that it picked some people and skipped others, said William Powderly, head of the Institute for Public Health at Washington University of St. Louis.

The wave dissipated even though a vast majority of people tested showed no antibodies, Powderly said, so they were susceptible to the disease raging around them but didn't catch it.

"Shouldn't it just cut through everybody and find everybody who is vulnerable?" he wondered. "The transmission dynamics of this virus are not completely worked out. ... There is variability in the virus and variability in the population."

As to what will happen next, he said, scientists have to acknowledge "the necessary humility. I just think we don't know."

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HEADLINE	03/01 Day 6 of Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/01/ukraine-what-we-know-day-six-russia-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More than 70 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed after Russian artillery hit a military base in Okhtyrka, a city between Kharkiv and Kyiv, the head of the region wrote on Telegram.• Russian forces have launched rocket attacks that killed "dozens" of civilians in Ukraine's second city of Kharkiv, and began a renewed assault on the capital Kyiv.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least nine people have been killed, including three children, and 37 wounded in one day after the shelling in the Kharkiv, the city's mayor said. • The southern Ukraine city of Kherson is “surrounded” by Russian soldiers, according to accounts by a Ukrainian journalist, Alyona Panina, and the city's mayor. • The international criminal court's prosecutor has announced that he will launch an investigation into possible war crimes or crimes against humanity in Ukraine. • Satellite images taken on Monday show a Russian military convoy north-west of Kyiv that stretches for about 40 miles (64 km), Reuters reports. • Russia used a vacuum bomb on Monday in its invasion of Ukraine, according to Oksana Markarova, the Ukrainian ambassador to the US. • The United States has promised more sanctions against Russia and more weapons for Ukraine's military, according to Ukraine's foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba. • The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported at least 406 civilian casualties, including at least 102 dead. • Canada will supply upgraded ammunition and anti-tank weapons to Ukraine, prime minister Justin Trudeau said. • The Ukrainian president has called for a no-fly zone for Russian missiles, planes and helicopters following the attack on Kharkiv. • Volodymyr Zelenskiy also signed an official request for Ukraine to join the EU. A senior EU official said leaders may discuss the possibility of Ukrainian membership at an informal summit in March. • Ukraine has opened its border to foreigners willing to fight. Ukraine's president has issued a decree temporarily lifting requirements for entry visas. • Fifa and Uefa have suspended Russia's national and club teams from all international competitions until further notice. • The US will expel 12 members of Russia's UN mission, accusing them of having “abused their privileges” by engaging in espionage that is harmful to national security. • High-level talks between Ukraine and Russia that took place on the border with Belarus on Monday morning ended without a breakthrough. Both sides agreed to keep the negotiations going and a second round of talks could take place in the coming days.
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HEADLINE	03/01 Thermobaric weapons: how they work
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/01/what-are-thermobaric-weapons-and-how-do-they-work
GIST	<p>Fears have risen over the use of thermobaric weapons by Russia after the Ukrainian ambassador to the US said a vacuum bomb – another term for the weapon – had been used during the invasion.</p> <p>The use of such weapons, which suck in oxygen from the surrounding air to generate a high-temperature explosion, has yet to be independently confirmed, though footage from Ukraine has shown thermobaric rocket launchers on Russia's TOS-1 vehicles.</p> <p>Dr Marcus Hellyer, senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said while it was not clear if they had been deployed yet by Russia in Ukraine, it was only “a matter of time”.</p> <p>How do they work?</p> <p>The thermobaric weapon, also known as an aerosol bomb or fuel air explosive, is a two-stage munition.</p> <p>The first-stage charge distributes an aerosol made up of very fine material – from a carbon-based fuel to tiny metal particles. A second charge ignites that cloud, creating a fireball, a huge shock wave, and a vacuum as it sucks up all surrounding oxygen.</p> <p>The blast wave can last for significantly longer than a conventional explosive and is capable of vaporising human bodies.</p>

Such weapons are used for a variety of purposes and come in a range of sizes. Hellyer says what we may see in Ukraine is Russia using them in a “bunker-buster” role to destroy defensive positions. Extremely large, air-launched versions are designed to destroy caves and tunnel complexes.

Where have they been used?

The bombs have been used by Russian and western forces since the 1960s. The US relied on them in its attempts to eliminate al-Qaida in the mountains in Afghanistan. Hellyer said Russia had a longer track record with them than the west. “Russia has systems right across the spectrum ... from quite small tactical weapons, to huge, air-launched bombs.

“The separatists that Russia was supporting in the Donbas region, they have been using them for a number of years now.”

In 2000, Human Rights Watch condemned Russia’s reported used of the weapons a year earlier in [Chechnya](#) as “a dangerous escalation” with “important humanitarian implications”.

How dangerous are they?

Hellyer said thermobaric weapons were effective at their “specific purpose” of “primarily destroying defensive positions”. While they would not be used to penetrate a tank, they could be a ““very destructive weapon” against an apartment complex or other building.

“They are not illegal even though their effects can be pretty horrific, because of that effect of creating a vacuum and sucking the air out of the lungs of defenders,” he said.

Given their use is “pretty standard” in terms of Russian tactics, Hellyer said he expected to see more thermobaric warfare in Ukraine.

“One of the things we know about Russian tactics is that they are willing to destroy everything.

“It’s clear that the Ukrainians are hunkering down in some of the cities ... as that continues the Russians are going to resort more and more to using ... whatever weapons they have including thermobaric weapons in built-up urban areas.”

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HEADLINE	03/01 Moscow ‘adapts tactics’: kill civilians
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/ukraine-several-killed-by-russian-rocket-strikes-in-civilian-areas-of-kharkiv
GIST	<p>At least nine people have been killed and 37 injured after Russian forces launched multiple rocket strikes on the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv in what appeared to mark a change in tactics by Moscow towards bombing civilian areas.</p> <p>The city’s mayor, Ihor Terekhov, said the toll included the deaths of three children.</p> <p>“Today we had a very difficult day. It showed us that it’s not just a war, this is a massacre of Ukrainian people,” Terekhov said on his Telegram account. “The missiles hit residential buildings, killing and injuring peaceful civilians. Kharkiv has not seen such damage for a very long time. And this is horrible.”</p> <p>He said four people were killed when they emerged from a shelter to find water and a family of two adults and three children were burned alive in their car.</p> <p>Video showed dozens of Grad missiles raining down on the centre of Ukraine’s second-biggest city, landing among residential buildings. One resident described the attack as “horrendous” and the worst yet, following five days of remorseless bombardment and Russia’s invasion.</p>

The attack came despite a call between the French president, Emmanuel Macron, and Vladimir Putin in which, according to the Elysée palace, the Russian president had said he was “willing to commit” to ending attacks on civilians and civil infrastructure while peace talks in Belarus were under way.

Gruesome video footage showed the aftermath of one strike on the city’s central Klochivska Street. A Grad missile landed outside number 197, blowing the leg off a woman who had gone shopping during a break in the curfew. She died soon afterwards.

“My brother’s colleague lives in the street. She saw what happened and heard the sound of the rocket. When she looked out from her balcony she saw the woman lying in agony, her leg blown off and to one side,” Artem Volodymyrovich, a 31-year-old English teacher, said.

The colleague – who declined to be named – took a photo from her balcony. It shows a patch of blood and the motor part of a Grad missile sticking out of the concrete pavement. A few stunned onlookers were taking pictures on their phones.

Other video footage filmed on Monday shows a series of Russian missiles pulverising the centre of Kharkiv, apparently fired by a multiple rocket launcher system (MRLA). Flames, smoke and dust rise in a line into the sky.

At least five civilians and two soldiers were killed in Kharkiv, the Kyiv Independent newspaper reported, with 22 civilians and 20 soldiers injured. Ukraine’s interior ministry put the figure higher and said dozens had died in the attack, with hundreds injured.

The unprecedented onslaught may be retaliation for the events of Sunday, when Ukrainian forces repelled a move by Russian light armoured vehicles to enter and seize the city. Its governor, Oleh Sinegubov, said Kharkiv was under Kyiv’s control – something residents confirmed.

Volodymyrovich said he ventured out into the streets on Monday afternoon and walked with his brother to the railway station. The situation had worsened, he said: “Bombing has been going on from morning to evening. It’s horrendous, just horrible.”

“I heard Grads. It’s different from machine gun fire which we have got used to and can identify. There are tank tracks on the asphalt on both sides of the road.” More rockets landed near the 23 August metro station, just north of the centre, he said.

He explained that he was now fleeing the city on a packed train heading to the west. “I don’t know if my train will arrive,” he said. “I’m with lots of foreigners from India and Pakistan. It’s free. There are no tickets and we are crowded in a carriage.”

Ukraine’s former defence minister Andriy Zagorodnyuk said Russia was now using multiple rocket launcher systems to target civilian infrastructure. Grad attacks were taking place in Kyiv and Mariupol, he said, amid Kremlin frustration that a military breakthrough had not yet been achieved.

“We expect Russia will adapt its tactics without changing strategic plans. That may include missiles and airstrikes on the entire depth of Ukraine,” he said.

He added: “In addition it is expected to move from the ‘accidental’ destruction of civilian objects (kindergartens, hospitals, apartment buildings) to planned and targeted terrorist activities to target civilian infrastructure. The aim is to create panic and to force capitulation.”

Kharkiv is a Russian-speaking city and home to 1.4 million people.

Vladimir Putin claimed to be protecting Russian speakers when he launched his “special operation” in Ukraine last week – a claim belied by the blatant shelling of residential areas.

“This is the protection of the Russian-speaking population? We will never forgive Russia for all these deaths,” Kristina Berdyskykh, one of Ukraine’s top journalists, tweeted on Monday.

Another clip filmed in Kharkiv shows a Grad missile sitting in the ruined living room of a private flat. Water drops down from a hole in the ceiling. There is a growing puddle on the floor. The missile did not explode.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, there was a relative lull in the capital, Kyiv, where supermarkets were reopened and residents were allowed out of bomb shelters and homes for the first time since a curfew was imposed on Saturday.

The strategic port city of Mariupol was “hanging on”, according to Oleksiy Arestovich, an adviser to Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Residents said the eastern port city on the Sea of Azov was surrounded by Russian forces and under heavy fire.

“We hear planes in the sky. It’s overcast. We can’t tell whether there are ours or Russians’,” Anatoliy Lozar said, speaking from a basement where he was sheltering with his family.

Lozar said he was helping evacuate civilians following another night of heavy bombardment. He said Russian warplanes had bombed the village of Shyrokyne, 12 miles (20km) west of Mariupol, with Ukrainian soldiers wounded.

The village on the frontline with the self-proclaimed separatist Donetsk people’s republic was still under Ukrainian control, he said.

He added: “We have become the new Stalingrad. We are killing Russians. Some have been taken prisoner. Families are hiding in basements. They are terrified. Huge numbers of volunteers have been joining the army. We have weapons. We will fight to the last.”

Lozar said attempts had been made to evacuate the wounded by helicopters, which has come under Russian fire. He said some Russian diversionary groups had rented apartments inside the city ahead of the invasion and had been plotting attacks.

Despite a slow start to its five-day military offensive, and fierce Ukrainian resistance, Russia was getting closer to its strategic goal of capturing the 150 miles strip along the Sea of Azov, between the Crimean peninsula and Mariupol.

On Sunday Russian military vehicles rolled into Berdyansk, a small port city of around 100,000 people. Soldiers took over the city’s administration building. Crowds gathered outside to protest and sang the Ukrainian national anthem. They also chanted: “Putin is a dick.”

The Russian news agency Interfax reported that Russian troops had advanced from the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson towards the city of Mykolaiv.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian state communications service said in a post on Telegram that a missile had hit a residential building in the Ukrainian city of Chernihiv near the border with Belarus.

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HEADLINE	03/01 Ukrainians fear ‘cultural catastrophe’
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/01/cultural-catastrophe-ukrainians-fear-for-art-and-monuments-amid-onslaught
GIST	Millions of artworks and monuments are at risk from Russia’s military onslaught in Ukraine, with one museum already burned to the ground, the global arts organisation Getty has said.

Ukrainian scholars are warning of an “unfolding cultural catastrophe”, Getty said in a statement from James Cuno, the president and chief executive officer of the J Paul Getty Trust.

Fedir Androshchuk, the director of the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in Kyiv, said he was attempting to safeguard the museum from attack or looting alongside two colleagues and two armed police.

“The museum is located in the middle of a rich cultural heritage area near three fine churches, but also close to some possible targets (the Ukrainian security service and border forces),” he wrote in an email to a Swedish academic.

Getty said Russian forces had begun destroying Ukraine’s cultural heritage, including the Ivankiv museum, about 50 miles north of Kyiv, which housed “precious Ukrainian folk art”.

Monuments at risk represent “centuries of history from the Byzantine to the baroque periods” and Unesco world heritage sites.

Ukraine’s ministry of foreign affairs tweeted on Monday that 25 works by the folk artist Maria Prymachenko held by the museum had been lost. “She created world-famous masterpieces. Her special gift and talent captivated Pablo Picasso,” said the ministry.

In recognition of her contribution to the field of folk art, Unesco, the UN’s cultural and heritage body, declared 2009 the year of Prymachenko.

There are seven world heritage sites in Ukraine, including St Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, which contains unique mosaics and frescoes from the early 16th century, and Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, an Orthodox monastery founded in 1051.

The entire ancient quarter of Lviv, dating from the 13th century, is also a world heritage site.

Getty said: “The material cultural heritage of the world is our common heritage, the identity and inspiration for all humanity. Cultural heritage has the power to unite us and is critical for achieving peace.

“It is also too often the target of war, another way to destroy and overtake a society by erasing its memory.”

Much of the world’s ancient heritage had already suffered from “wanton destruction, looting, neglect, reckless overdevelopment, and climate change. To have even more lost to senseless war is unconscionable.”

Getty said he condemned “the cultural atrocities being committed now in Ukraine, together with the unfathomable human and environmental losses. We stand in solidarity with our Ukrainian colleagues. Protecting and preserving our cultural heritage is a core value of civilised societies. What is taking place in Ukraine is a tragedy of monumental proportions.”

In his email, Androshchuk said four museums – in Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Sumy and Chernihiv – had “managed to take down and protect their main exhibitions. In Vinnytsia, the museum building is now partly used for internally displaced people. So far I have not heard that any of the aforementioned museums has been subject to looting or attack.”

But he added: “There is no guarantee that the Ukrainian cultural heritage will not be plundered and transferred to Russian museums, especially given that Kyiv has a special place in Putin’s interpretation of Russian history and its roots.

	<p>“Many finds made in Ukraine during the 1800s and early 1900s are already in the two finest Russian museums. And there is also evidence that objects from archaeological excavations in Crimea have been sent to the Hermitage in St Petersburg.”</p> <p>There were “established instructions, dating to Soviet times, on what museums should do in case of armed conflict – to take down and hide objects in a certain order of priority and documentation. The problem is how to do all this with a lack of time and resources.</p> <p>“You cannot force employees to come in and work under such circumstances. Many are fleeing with their families. But I am very proud of my colleagues. Many of them came to the museum and helped to dismantle the permanent exhibition, pack objects, and store them in the basement. After this effort, two archaeologists and two young historians, my young colleagues, headed straight to the front.</p> <p>“At present, I see my mission as the following – to stay at the museum until the defence works.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Vaccinations drop, hospitalizations decline
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/28/us-new-covid-vaccinations-decline-cases-hospitalizations-drop
GIST	<p>On some days Marilyn Datillo, a vaccine nurse, used to see 900 people enter Mercy Covid Vaccine Clinic in Kirkwood, a St Louis suburb. Now, she said sometimes fewer than 20 people visit the clinic in one day – even though only 55% of Missouri residents are fully vaccinated and just 22% are boosted.</p> <p>When someone does show up to get vaccinated, “you celebrate”, Datillo said.</p> <p>But she and infectious disease doctors do not anticipate many more people suddenly deciding to get their first shot – or ending delays on second shots and boosters – amid declining numbers of Covid cases and hospitalizations in the US; the lifting of vaccine mandates and other restrictions; and some talk of the end of the pandemic being in view.</p> <p>The number of new people getting vaccinated in America has steadily declined in recent months, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data. The seven-day average of new vaccinations now mirrors the rates from December 2020, when there was a limited supply of the vaccines.</p> <p>But doctors emphasize that the virus remains a threat in the US and that people who are not vaccinated are at greater risk of become severely ill or dying. They point to the fact that the seven-day average of new cases on 23 February in the United States was 76,667, according to the New York Times data. On 23 February last year, the seven-day average was 67,854.</p> <p>The seven-day average of deaths on those dates were also not much different: 1,908 and 2,056.</p> <p>“I can think back to just last week when I had to put someone on a breathing machine who was unvaccinated, so this continues to be with us,” said Dr Anuj Mehta, a pulmonologist with Denver Health in Colorado, where 69% of people are fully vaccinated and 34% boosted.</p> <p>Even though the number of cases and hospitalizations have plummeted since the height of the Omicron surge, Mehta continues to worry because new variants will emerge “until we get the entire world vaccinated”, he said.</p> <p>“I could imagine a time this summer or fall” when people who “tested positive for Covid in the last three months will think that they have ongoing immunity, and I think that’s not true”, said Mehta.</p> <p>But Mehta admits that he is unsure whether it’s realistic that the whole world will get vaccinated.</p>

He said he is encouraged by the development of a new Covid vaccine that does not need to be stored at as low temperature as existing ones and thus could make it easier to vaccinate much of the world.

“We need to push forward on that and help as a global community member to achieve that goal, which in turn will help protect the United States,” said Mehta.

Dr Farrin Manian, an infectious disease specialist and chair of the department of medicine at Mercy Hospital St Louis, conceded that there are people who aren’t going to change their minds about vaccination. But in talking with patients, he still encounters some who are open to it.

“I think we just need to talk about what has happened in the last year and hopefully get people to change their minds and honestly discuss the effectiveness of the vaccine in reducing hospitalizations,” said Manian.

Mehta also thinks there could be more opportunities for conversations about the vaccines because so many people skipped primary care during the pandemic and will hopefully now return to see their doctors.

A January poll from the University of Michigan Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation found that among older adults, only about half of the unvaccinated had rescheduled a primary care appointment that was disrupted by the pandemic in 2021, compared with 85% of those who were boosted and 74% of those who were vaccinated.

“We would have a slight increase in the rates of boosting and vaccines in general if people were to have a real conversation with an individual provider,” said Mehta. “Seeing patients in the clinic with lung disease, I am far more likely to convince somebody to get the vaccine when I am talking to them in person.”

“When I ask them why they don’t want to, they cite everything they see on Facebook, and I am able to counter that in an individual appointment, when they are there to check in on their asthma or their COPD,” he added.

Datillo, the vaccine nurse, still encounters people who decided to get vaccinated only after losing a loved one who also wasn’t vaccinated.

And people who didn’t get a vaccine because they were concerned about its impact on their ability to have children.

Or people who initially didn’t get a booster because, they said, “I got Covid anyway, and I was sick, so why bother getting the booster?”

Datillo is, of course, only seeing them because they eventually decided to get the shot, but most people’s “judgement has been made”, she said.

If that’s the case, people who have not gotten a booster or people whose immunity from an infection has waned could “become more susceptible to severe disease”, said Bill Hanage, an epidemiologist at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health. “I do think it’s of the utmost importance that we keep an eye on the virus over the summer and don’t assume that everything that’s going to happen is in the rearview mirror.”

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HEADLINE	02/28 New Zealand Covid transmission rates soar
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/previously-virus-free-new-zealand-now-has-one-of-worlds-highest-covid-transmission-rates
GIST	New Zealand has ended its self-isolation requirements for vaccinated travellers arriving from Australia, as the country’s Covid transmission rates soar to among the highest in the world.

From Wednesday, vaccinated travellers will no longer need to self-isolate but will still be required to undergo a Covid-19 test on arrival and on day five or six, prime minister Jacinda Ardern announced on Monday.

If the traveller tests positive for the virus, they will be required to self-isolate, in line with requirements for New Zealanders. Unvaccinated travellers will still have to stay in managed isolation, or MIQ.

“I know this will be welcome news to the members of our team overseas eager to travel home to see loved ones as soon as possible. We can’t wait to see you,” Ardern said. “It’s also a huge milestone for our tourism sector and regional economies.”

The staged border reopening previously announced would still stand, but with some adjustments, she said.

The first stage, which began on Monday, now means vaccinated New Zealanders and other visa holders arriving from Australia only have to self-isolate until midnight Wednesday, when the new rules kick in. Step two, which was to allow returning New Zealanders and eligible critical workers from the rest of the world to skip isolation, was due to start from 13 March but will be brought forward to Friday. Cabinet will consider the settings for all other travellers in the coming months.

Epidemiologist Michael Baker said there was no longer much public health justification for continuing controls at the border, because “people arriving from overseas will not contribute to the disease burden”.

“We have almost got to the point now where people arriving in New Zealand have a lower prevalence of Omicron infection than people who live in New Zealand.”

New Zealand now has one of the highest levels of Covid-19 transmission in the world, researchers have said – an extraordinary turnaround for a country that had managed to dampen the virus’s spread throughout much of the pandemic.

Covid-19 modellers at Rako Science have calculated New Zealand’s effective reproduction number – or R value – to be 4.23, meaning the average infected person is passing Omicron on to more than four people. That gives New Zealand the highest R value of more than 180 countries by a high margin, with Myanmar recording the second-highest rate of spread at 2.98.

The country is in the midst of an Omicron surge, with 334 people in hospital and 14,633 cases reported on Monday, including the environment minister, David Parker, who became its first MP to report testing positive for the virus since the pandemic began. In a tweet, he said he was isolating at home and had not been at parliament, nor with other MPs or staff, for a week.

Baker said he was “not at all surprised” about the high R value at this point, partly because the rest of the world had already been through Omicron outbreaks.

Another reason for the sudden increase in R value could be due to the introduction of rapid antigen testing (RAT) last week, which made testing faster and more convenient, he said. “More people have gone on to get tested, so we are seeing a huge spike in cases ... It’s not that the iceberg’s any bigger, you’re just seeing more of it.”

Baker cautioned against paying too much attention to a shifting R value rate, which can be distorted by changes to testing methods, in favour of closely watching hospitalisation rates. Those rates gave a better, and more consistent, idea of how the outbreak was progressing, he said.

New Zealand’s first case of Covid-19 was detected two years ago on Monday. Baker said while it was “quite ironic that two years on, we are facing the most extreme transmission Covid-19 since the beginning the pandemic”, it was remarkable that New Zealand had achieved the lowest mortality in the OECD, by a huge margin. The country has reported 61 deaths in the pandemic.

HEADLINE	02/28 Switzerland adopts EU sanctions on Russia
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/switzerland-adopts-wholesale-eu-sanctions-against-russia
GIST	<p>Switzerland, a bastion of neutrality through two world wars, has decided to adopt wholesale swingeing EU sanctions against Russia, potentially freezing billions of dollars in assets and further increasing the pressure on the Russian economy. Swiss national bank data showed that Russian companies and individuals held assets worth more than \$11bn in Swiss banks in 2020.</p> <p>The Federal Council also announced it had banned five oligarchs close to Vladimir Putin from entering the country. Flights from Russia are being banned, although this will not apply to flights carrying diplomats.</p> <p>Switzerland had until now adopted very limited measures, including barring Swiss companies from taking on new business with three Russian oligarchs named by the EU as sanctions targets last week. Switzerland is obliged by law to adopt UN sanctions but has a choice over how it responds to EU measures. Its refusal to do more last week was heavily criticised by the EU for letting neutrality and Swiss banking laws become complicity.</p> <p>The Swiss president, Ignazio Cassis, said it was possible a precedent had been set, but added: “Never since the second world war has the rights of one country been so violated by another. You cannot stand aside. To play into the hands of an aggressor is not neutral.” He insisted it did not mean Switzerland’s role as an active mediator was over.</p> <p>The government is not imposing a ban on commodity trading. Nearly 80% of Russian commodity trading takes place virtually via financial service centres in Switzerland. Russian energy and raw materials groups such as Gazprom and Russian state banks have major branches in Switzerland.</p> <p>The new steps are qualitatively different from anything Switzerland has done previously to shackle Russia, partly because the measures adopted by the EU itself are so sweeping. It is not clear if Russia’s Central Bank holds large foreign reserves in Switzerland, but the country no longer becomes a haven for Russian cash.</p> <p>The Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the Swiss-based global financial umbrella body nicknamed the “bank for central banks”, has said it will not be an avenue for any circumvention of western sanctions placed on Russia for invading Ukraine.</p> <p>More than 20,000 people marched though Berne on Sunday in protest at the invasion, and the Swiss socialist party had urged the executive Federal Council to take stronger measures.</p> <p>Last week, Ignazio Cassis condemned Russian aggression in a strongly worded statement, but he has been trying to balance calls for sanctions with the country’s traditional commitment to neutrality.</p> <p>Formally, the measures do not undermine that widely supported neutrality principle, as Switzerland says it is acting in defence of international law, but Moscow is hardly likely to accept that explanation.</p> <p>Meanwhile Finland has taken the “historic” decision to supply weapons to Ukraine, the country’s government announced. Finland is a member of the EU but not of Nato, although it does have partnership status with the US-led military alliance.</p> <p>Switzerland did not adopt the EU’s sanctions after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, citing the work it was doing through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to help bring about a ceasefire.</p> <p>Germany and Sweden have similarly found longstanding political shibboleths challenged by Russia’s actions.</p>

	<p>Switzerland, alongside London, is probably the single biggest home for Russian oligarchs seeking to house their cash. Attracted to the country's strict banking secrecy laws, Russians held nearly 10.4bn Swiss francs (\$11.24bn) in Switzerland in 2020, Swiss National Bank data shows.</p> <p>The government said on Friday that financial "intermediaries" in Switzerland were now banned from starting new business relationships with 363 Russian people and four Russian companies. Any existing business must be reported to the Swiss economic affairs secretariat. Further steps are under consideration.</p> <p>The Swiss embassy in Moscow reported last year that "Switzerland has for years been by far the most important destination worldwide for rich Russians to manage their wealth," and that net transfers by Russian taxpayers to Switzerland totalled \$2.5bn in 2020.</p> <p>The Swiss government represents the interests of the former Soviet republic of Georgia in Moscow and Russia's interests in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, under an arrangement set up after those two countries broke off bilateral ties during their conflict in 2008.</p> <p>On Sunday the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, asked his Swiss counterpart to act as a neutral mediator between Ukraine and Russia and help work towards a ceasefire, notably in the context of a Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva opening on Monday.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Major league cricket headed to Seattle
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3371870/major-league-cricket-headed-to-seattle-with-newly-planned-marymoor-venue/
GIST	<p>Seattle area's oldest park, Marymoor, is slated to begin construction of a major league cricket facility as early as 2023.</p> <p>Last week, the King County Council passed a motion to greenlight King County's parks department to work collaboratively with the city leaders in Bellevue and Redmond to construct a major league cricket facility at Marymoor Park. The unanimous approval vote follows similar moves made by city councils in both cities.</p> <p>The venue, tentatively labeled the Marymoor Cricket Community Park, would be situated on 20 acres at Redmond's Marymoor Park and would function as a professional venue for Major League Cricket (MLC). The venue would also host youth and adult casual games as it is designated for multipurpose use.</p> <p>The proposal notes that the U.S. will host the 2024 Cricket World Cup, and were the Seattle area to have a cricket facility up and running by then, it would become a potentially attractive location.</p> <p>"Cricket is the second most popular sport in the world with some three and a half billion fans worldwide, and it has a growing fan base here in King County," Councilmember Rod Dembowski said in council session on Feb. 22.</p> <p>Marymoor Cricket Community Park would accommodate 4,000 to 6,000 spectators with scaling ability to accommodate as many as 10,000.</p> <p>Major League Cricket currently has six teams in the U.S. scheduled to begin play in 2023. Seattle is home to a minor league franchise, the Seattle Thunderbolts, which practices out of North Bend. Its 2022 season is scheduled to begin in June.</p> <p>"Sports and outside recreation [are] evolving," Councilmember Claudia Balducci continued. "One thing we found some years ago was that cricket has really been booming in East King County and probably other parts of King County as well. There's just not enough space for it. What you're seeing from the community is the tremendous demand for a space to play at the highest level."</p>

	<p>“There are opportunities for us to have a truly world-class cricket right here in our backyard. Right next to the light rail station just by the by. I think it’s great that this partnership is coming together.”</p> <p>Seattle hosts three adult league cricket programs, 3,500 members large.</p> <p>“I went to a [cricket] tournament last summer at Marymoor and I learned so much, but I was so impressed by the families that were coming together from various parts of the world, from West Indies, South Africa, India, Pakistan ... they’re united because of their interest in the sport and anything that brings people together,” Councilmember Pete von Reichbauer added.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 EU claims adequate winter energy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/business/energy-environment/russia-eu-energy.html
GIST	<p>Europe’s energy supply is sufficient to get through the winter, but the Russian invasion of Ukraine has exposed vulnerabilities that need to be addressed, the European Union’s energy commissioner said Monday.</p> <p>“We cannot let any third country destabilize our energy markets or influence our energy choices,” the commissioner, Kadri Simson, told reporters after a joint meeting of European Union energy ministers and the European Commission, the bloc’s executive arm, in Brussels.</p> <p>She said the Russian invasion “made our vulnerability painfully clear.” Russia provides nearly 40 percent of the European Union’s natural gas and more than 25 percent of its crude oil.</p> <p>Next week, the commission will present a long-awaited proposal on strengthening energy independence, especially from Russia. But the recent increase of energy prices, along with inflation more generally, complicates that goal.</p> <p>The strategy is to diversify gas supplies to reduce reliance on Russia in the short term, Ms. Simson said, but ultimately to “boost renewables and energy efficiency as fast as technically possible,” in the spirit of the European Union’s commitment to become carbon-neutral by 2050.</p> <p>Part of the strategy is increasing the capacity for importing liquefied natural gas. The commission has been reaching out to several gas producers — including the United States, Qatar, Azerbaijan, Nigeria and Egypt — and to Japan and South Korea, to see whether they could redirect some of their imported supplies to Europe. E.U. imports of liquefied natural gas set a record in January.</p> <p>The commission will also propose a mechanism for voluntary reduction of consumption, Ms. Simson said, but she did not elaborate.</p> <p>Separately, the bloc stepped up its work on synchronization of Moldova’s and Ukraine’s electricity grids with the European one “as soon as possible” because of the Russian invasion.</p> <p>“The political will is there — we have to help Ukraine,” said France’s minister for ecological transition, Barbara Pompili. “They are at a risk of a blackout, which would have very heavy consequences.”</p> <p>Member nations also stand ready to release their strategic oil reserves if needed, Ms. Simson said. All E.U. countries are members of the International Energy Agency, and they are obliged to hold at least 90 days of oil reserves. If supplies are severely disrupted, they can decide to release their stocks to the market.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Markets turbulent over Russia economy
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/business/russia-ukraine-stock-market.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout_link_back_to_briefing
GIST	<p>Stocks on Wall Street fell on Monday and commodity prices rose as the war in Ukraine entered its fifth day and a widening array of sanctions aimed at punishing Russia for its invasion began to bite.</p> <p>The S&P 500 fell about 0.2 percent after dropping as much as 1.5 percent earlier in the day. Stock indexes in Europe also ended well off their lowest point of the day, with the Stoxx Europe 600 down about 0.1 percent.</p> <p>In Russia, the ruble cratered, and the Bank of Russia responded by more than doubling its key interest rate to 20 percent to try to control the damage from the sanctions. The country's central bank also said it would release about \$7 billion worth of bank reserves that had been set aside as a buffer for unsecured consumer and mortgage loans.</p> <p>The sanctions imposed by governments in Europe and the United States so far include financial measures against Russian elites, banks and nonfinancial companies; bans on technological exports to Russia and on flights by Russian airlines; suspension of the approval process for Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Germany; and measures isolating Russia's biggest banks.</p> <p>Over the weekend, the United States, the European Commission, Britain and Canada agreed to remove some Russian banks from the international system of payments known as SWIFT — a move that essentially bars the banks from international transactions and is seen as a steep escalation of the effort to impose financial penalties on Russia.</p> <p>The measure could disrupt the country's exports, and investors are already concerned that the impact on Russia's ability to export its commodities, including oil and wheat, could have an inflationary effect on the global economy.</p> <p>"The fear of energy supply disruptions kicked off the down move today," said Fiona Cincotta, senior financial markets analyst at Forex.com.</p> <p>Russia produces more than 10 million barrels a day of crude oil, behind only the United States and Saudi Arabia. Oil prices rose about 3 percent on Monday, and shares of energy producers were among the best performers on Wall Street. Brent crude traded at just under \$101 a barrel.</p> <p>On Monday, the Treasury Department said that it would freeze assets of the Russian Central Bank that are held in the United States and impose sanctions on the Russian Direct Investment Fund, while Switzerland said it would freeze Russian assets in Swiss banks.</p> <p>European banks with major holdings in Russia were among the big losers on Monday. UniCredit of Italy fell 9.5 percent, and Raiffeisen Bank International in Austria lost 14 percent. The European Central Bank said that Sberbank Europe, a subsidiary of one of Russia's biggest banks, was on the verge of collapse Monday as Western sanctions took a toll.</p> <p>Big Wall Street banks were among the worst performers in the S&P 500. Citigroup fell 4.4 percent, while JPMorgan Chase was down 4.2 percent and Goldman Sachs dropped 2.5 percent.</p> <p>Shares of BP, the British oil company, fell 4 percent in London after it said on Sunday that it would no longer hold its 20 percent stake in the Russian oil giant Rosneft. It did not say whether it would sell the shares or abandon them. The decision could lead to a write-down of as much as \$25 billion for BP.</p> <p>The New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq on Monday halted trading of shares of several Russian companies, including the steel company Mechel PAO and the internet company Yandex. Halts are not suspensions or delistings; they are meant to give the exchange time to gather information about the impact of recent events on a company.</p>

	<p>The yield on U.S. 10-year Treasury notes, a traditional haven in crises, fell thirteen basis points to 1.84 percent.</p> <p>Treasury yields had been rising this year in anticipation of Federal Reserve short-term interest rate increases aimed at combating inflation, but a surge of investor bids during the Ukraine crisis reversed that trend.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Germany: far-right, Covid protesters merge
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/world/europe/germany-covid-far-right-protests.html
GIST	<p>DRESDEN, Germany — First vaccine opponents attacked the police. Then a group of them chatted online about killing the governor. And one day an angry crowd beating drums and carrying torches showed up outside the house of the health minister of the eastern state of Saxony.</p> <p>The minister, Petra Köpping, had just gotten home when her phone rang. It was a neighbor and he sounded afraid. When Ms. Köpping peered out of her window into the dark, she saw several dozen faces across the street, flickering in the torchlight.</p> <p>“They came to intimidate and threaten me,” she recalled in an interview. “I had just come home and was alone. I’ve been in politics for 30 years, but I have never seen anything like this. There is a new quality to this.”</p> <p>The crowd was swiftly dispersed by the police, but the incident in December represented a turning point in a country where the SA, Hitler’s paramilitary organization, was notorious not just for showing up at the homes of political rivals with torches and drums, but for attacking and even murdering them.</p> <p>It was the clearest indication yet that a protest movement against Covid measures that has mobilized tens of thousands in cities and villages across the country was increasingly merging with the far right, each finding new purpose and energy and further radicalizing the other.</p> <p>The dynamic is much the same whether in Germany or Canada, and the protests in various countries have echoes of one another. On the streets of Dresden one recent Monday, the signs and slogans were nearly identical to those on the streets of Ottawa: “Freedom,” “Democracy” and “The Great Resist.”</p> <p>In Germany, at least, the merging of the movements has taken an increasingly sinister turn, with a specter of violence that is alarming security agencies. Since December, the threats have only intensified.</p> <p>Last month the far-right Alternative for Germany party called for another protest outside of Ms. Köpping’s home. (The police stopped it.) Hospital staff in Dresden, the Saxon capital, have been attacked. A second governor has received death threats. And when the police raided the homes of nine people who had debated ways to kill Michael Kretschmer, the governor of Saxony, on the messenger service Telegram, they discovered weapons and bomb-making ingredients like gunpowder and sulfur.</p> <p>As the pandemic enters its third year, Germany is emerging from another long winter of high case numbers that are now slowly receding. While the government is preparing to lift restrictions, Chancellor Olaf Scholz is determined to turn a general vaccine mandate into law ahead of the next fall.</p> <p>The debate about Covid restrictions has energized a far-right scene that thrives on a sense of crisis and apocalypse.</p> <p>Germany’s far right, which in recent years used anger over an influx of refugees and Europe’s debt crisis to recruit, has seized on the virus as its latest cause.</p>

If the issue is different, the messaging of those organizing the protests is eerily familiar: The state is failing, democracy is subverted by shady “globalists” and the people are urged to resist.

Now as then, what began with demonstrations against government policy has become personal. The number of verbal and physical attacks on politicians tripled last year to 4,458, according to federal police statistics. It is no longer just regional and local politicians who are targeted. The federal health minister and the chancellor’s chief crisis manager on the pandemic are among a growing group of officials requiring police protection.

Two and a half years after a regional politician who defended Germany’s refugee policy was shot dead on his front porch by a neo-Nazi, security agencies worry that far-right militants want to use the pandemic to unleash another wave of political violence.

“Violent resistance to democratic rules is now a frequent demand in the anti-corona protests,” Dirk-Martin Christian, domestic intelligence chief of the state of Saxony, said in an email interview. “The routine assertion that we live in a dictatorship and under an emergency regime that must be eliminated, and against which public resistance is legitimate, is evidence of the progressive radicalization of this movement.”

“There is an increasing willingness to use violence in the context of the protests,” Mr. Christian added, noting “the fantasies of murder” targeting Mr. Kretschmer, the Saxon governor, and “the SA-style procession” outside Ms. Köpping’s house.

The radicalization of protesters against Covid measures is most visible in the former Communist East, where far-right extremists now dominate the organization of the protests and control the information — and disinformation — on popular Telegram channels associated with the movement.

Saxony, the most populous eastern state, has a long history of far-right protests, starting with the annual neo-Nazi marches on the anniversary of the Dresden bombing in 1945.

In 2014, the anti-Muslim Pegida movement — short for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West — was founded there, then spread to other cities. For years its supporters marched on Monday nights, like the protesters who brought down Communism a quarter century earlier.

“We are the people,” the slogan associated with Pegida marches, is now popular at the coronavirus protests on Monday nights too.

The parallels are worrying, officials say, because prolonged street protests have proven to be powerful incubators of far-right violence.

“Regular protests have the effect of giving extremists the feeling that public opinion is with them and that the time to act is now,” said Michael Nattke, a former neo-Nazi who left the scene and has been doing anti-extremism work for the last two decades. “It creates its own dynamic.”

For intelligence officials, too, it’s no longer a question of if, but when.

“We are very concerned about the possible radicalization of individual perpetrators,” said Mr. Christian of the Saxon intelligence service.

One concern is that far-right extremists are tapping into the frustrations and fears of ordinary citizens who march alongside them every week. That regular proximity erodes boundaries.

“Something is becoming normalized that mustn’t be normalized,” said Ms. Köpping, the health minister. “It’s worrying that you can’t distinguish anymore who is on the streets because of vaccines and Covid restrictions — and who is already radicalized.”

On a recent Monday night in Dresden, eleven different protest “walks,” which had been advertised on Telegram, snaked their way through different parts of the city before coalescing into one march with some 3,000 people. Some carried candles, like the peaceful protesters who marched against the Berlin Wall in 1989. Others waved the flag of the Free Saxons, a new party that is so far right it considers the Alternative for Germany party “establishment.”

In the crowd was Betina Schmidt, a 57-year-old accountant in a red woolly hat. Ms. Schmidt said she was not just protesting government plans for a general vaccine mandate — but also a broader conspiracy by powerful globalists to “destroy the German nation.”

Until a few years ago she voted for the Greens. “Now I know they are not green, they are totalitarian,” Ms. Schmidt said. “What they want has nothing to do with the environment. They want the destruction of Germany.”

She stopped watching news on the public broadcaster last summer and is now getting most of her information on Telegram. Like many others here, Ms. Schmidt cited “The Great Reset,” a book by Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum in Davos, which Ms. Schmidt says reads like “a script for how a group of powerful globalists plan to destroy the German nation and create a mishmash of people that can be led easily.”

“I didn’t believe it either six months ago,” she added.

Matthias Pöhlmann, the author of “Right-Wing Esotericism,” a book about the fusion of far-right conspiracy theories with alternative views, said such theories were spreading fast — and well beyond the milieu of people traditionally open to far-right ideas.

“These conspiracy theories are powerful accelerators of radicalization,” he said. “If you believe someone wants to erase you, that you live in a dictatorship, violence is justified.”

Germany’s federal intelligence service, which is known as the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, recently created a new category for dangerous conspiracy theorists dubbed “delegitimization of the state.” It has also set up a “special organization” tasked with monitoring some 600 channels on Telegram associated with the protest movement.

Security agencies have been caught off guard before. Asked in September in Parliament whether there was “a concrete danger” coming from the pandemic protest movement, the government denied this, saying only that “some” protesters showed signs of radicalization and a “greater readiness to commit violence.”

Ten days later an employee of a gas station was shot dead by a customer after the employee asked him to put on a mask. The attacker had been a regular at the protest marches.

“They have been very slow to understand the risk,” said Mr. Nattke, who regularly meets with officials about the far-right threat and says he has been warning them for months. “It wasn’t really until the torchlight procession outside Petra Köpping’s house that they took it seriously.”

In Dresden, the group that fantasized about killing the Saxon governor, and is now under investigation for plotting terrorism, was first discovered by journalists. Now Mr. Christian’s office has its own team of half a dozen Telegram watchers, who scroll through hatred and disinformation to identify serious threats.

“It’s frightening how many people are following these calls for mobilization,” Mr. Christian said. “The erosion of the political center has already begun.”

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HEADLINE	02/28 US expels 12 Russia diplomats for spying
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/world/europe/us-russian-diplomats-un.html

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine the center of attention at the United Nations, the United States said Monday that it would expel 12 Russian diplomats from Moscow's U.N. mission, saying they were actually intelligence operatives who had spied on the United States.

"We are beginning the process of expelling 12 intelligence operatives from the Russian Mission who have abused their privileges of residency in the United States by engaging in espionage activities that are adverse to our national security," the U.S. mission to the U.N. said in a statement.

Russia could respond with "tit for tat," meaning expulsion of Americans, its U.N. ambassador, Vasily Nebenzya, told reporters.

"It's not our choice," he said. "We didn't initiate it."

Mr. Nebenzya — who learned of the expulsions when he received a phone call during a news conference — said the Russian diplomats had been given until March 7 to leave the United States.

The move is part of a larger effort to isolate Russia diplomatically and economically since it invaded Ukraine last week. Many countries have imposed economic sanctions on Russian officials and entities, corporations are exiting business deals with Russia, and some Russians are being barred from sporting and cultural events.

The U.N. General Assembly convened a rare emergency special session on Monday that was expected to continue on Tuesday and Wednesday because a long list of countries wanted to speak. Western countries speaking on Monday rebuked not only Russia, but also Belarus for aiding the invasion.

The assembly was expected to vote on a resolution on Wednesday condemning Russia's invasion and calling for an end to hostilities. The vote on the resolution, which would carry political weight but would not be legally binding, could offer a measure of how isolated Russia has become.

In his opening remarks, the U.N. secretary general, António Guterres, said: "The fighting in Ukraine must stop. It is raging across the country, from air, land and sea. It must stop now."

Mr. Guterres said the U.N. was increasing its efforts to respond to the humanitarian crisis caused by the invasion, and the United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting on Monday focused on that crisis.

The U.N. is preparing for up to four million refugees to flee Ukraine, and 520,000 have already done so, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, told the Security Council. In his 30 years of international humanitarian relief work, he said, "I have rarely seen such an incredibly fast-rising exodus of people, the largest in Europe since the Balkan War."

Martin Griffiths, the U.N. under secretary general for humanitarian affairs, told the council that 160,000 Ukrainians had been displaced within the country and that there had been at least 406 civilian casualties, including 102 people killed.

"We are very, very concerned about what we are seeing in the streets in some of the large, key cities in Ukraine," Mr. Griffiths said. "We will in time discover who did what and who broke which requirements of international law."

African members of the Security Council said they had received confirmation that Africans trying to flee Ukraine had been discriminated against and not allowed to cross borders.

Kenya's ambassador to the United Nations, Martin Kimani, warned against collective sanctions on Russia that amounted to a "full blockade" and risked punishing civilians.

HEADLINE	02/28 Russia rocket barrage kills civilians
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-kharkiv.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — The first talks between Ukraine and Russia aimed at halting the Russian invasion were eclipsed Monday by a deadly Russian rocket assault on Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, that raised new alarms about how far the Kremlin was willing to go to subjugate its smaller neighbor.</p> <p>The bombardment of a residential area of Kharkiv, which may have included internationally banned cluster munitions, killed at least nine civilians and wounded dozens.</p> <p>With the Ukrainian-Russian talks ending with little more than an agreement to meet again, the bombardment signaled a potential turn in the biggest military mobilization in Europe since World War II, in which Russia has met unexpectedly stiff resistance by Ukrainians and strong condemnation from much of the world.</p> <p>“Today showed that this is not only a war, it is the murder of us, the Ukrainian people,” Kharkiv’s mayor, Igor Terekhov, said in a video posted on Facebook. “This is the first time in its many-year history that the city of Kharkiv has been through something like this: shells that hit residential homes, killing and maiming innocent citizens.”</p> <p>Russian forces have been shelling the outskirts of Kharkiv, an eastern Ukrainian city with 1.5 million people, since launching an invasion last week. But they appeared to be avoiding heavily populated areas.</p> <p>On Monday, the fifth day of the Russian assault, that changed when Kharkiv was hit by a barrage of rockets.</p> <p>Mr. Terekhov said four people had been killed when they emerged from bomb shelters to find water. And he said a family of five — two adults and three children — was burned alive when a shell hit their car. Another 37 people were wounded, he said.</p> <p>President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine on Monday called for an international tribunal to investigate and punish Russia for its actions in his country, which he described as war crimes.</p> <p>“Today, Russian troops shelled Kharkiv using rocket artillery,” Mr. Zelensky said in a video posted on his Facebook page. “This is, without any doubt, a military crime. A peaceful city. Peaceful residential neighborhoods. Not a single military object in sight.”</p> <p>Neither Russia nor Ukraine is a member of the treaty that bans cluster munitions, which can be a variety of weapons — rockets, bombs, missiles and artillery projectiles — that disperse lethal bomblets in midair over a wide area, hitting military targets and civilians alike. But their use might well mark a new — and bloodier — chapter in the battle for Ukraine.</p> <p>“We are convinced that this was a cluster munition attack,” Stephen Goose, a munitions expert at Human Rights Watch, said in an email.</p> <p>The indiscriminate nature of the Kharkiv assault, made clear in videos verified by The New York Times, may indicate impatience by President Vladimir V. Putin with his military’s progress in what many outside analysts — and some Ukrainian commanders themselves — had predicted would be a fast Russian victory over an outgunned and outmanned adversary.</p> <p>Mr. Putin’s grievance-laden decision, announced last week, to invade Ukraine has inspired widespread resistance in the former Soviet republic and beyond. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians are fleeing their homeland, but many are staying put, turning to whatever weapons are at hand to try to thwart the invaders.</p> <p>Moscow is also encountering vigorous opposition internationally, and has become increasingly isolated as the United States and its allies vastly expand economic sanctions on Russia and on Mr. Putin’s allies. On</p>

Monday, Royal Dutch Shell became [the second big oil company in two days to quit partnerships in Russia](#), a major energy producer, following BP on Sunday.

More aggressive actions could be in store. Senator Christopher S. Murphy, Democrat of Connecticut, said after a classified briefing on Monday that the United States and allies were preparing to go beyond freezing the assets of Mr. Putin and Russian oligarchs and actually begin seizing them. “This is likely a further step than Putin’s inner circle anticipated,” [Mr. Murphy said on Twitter](#).

On Monday, international groups representing sports, culture and entertainment joined in banning or suspending Russian participants.

Even Switzerland, a favored haven of Russian oligarch money, sidelined its customary neutrality and froze assets held by Mr. Putin and his subordinates, further limiting their access to financial resources already squeezed by the sanctions announced by President Biden and members of the European Union.

The newly intensified economic penalties sent the Russian currency plunging by [almost 25 percent](#), forced the Russian financial authorities to double interest rates and close the stock market, and sent droves of spooked bank customers in Russia to A.T.M.’s so they could withdraw cash.

And a day after most of European airspace was closed to its flights, Russia responded in kind, barring many foreign airlines.

The face-to-face Russian-Ukrainian talks, held by representatives in Belarus, a close partner of Moscow’s, suggested that the Kremlin was feeling the pressure to at least appear amenable to diplomacy, but they ended with no discernible progress.

Even before they began, Mr. Zelensky, who has rejected Russian demands to capitulate, had signaled that he did not expect any diplomatic breakthroughs. As if to punctuate his disdain for Mr. Putin, on Monday he signed a decree requesting Ukraine’s immediate membership in the European Union. Officials in Brussels welcomed that request in principle, though suggested it was unrealistic.

All the while, Russian forces were pursuing their incursion amid signs that they might move to seize or encircle Kyiv, Mr. Zelensky’s base, and to isolate, capture or perhaps even kill the Ukrainian leader whose defiance of the Kremlin has made him a hero to many at home and abroad.

Satellite imagery showed that a large convoy of Russian armed forces, roughly 17 miles long, was about 20 miles north of Antonov Airport, on the outskirts of Kyiv, the capital. Its mayor, Vitali Klitschko, issued a statement advising residents to spend the night from Monday to Tuesday in basements or bomb shelters, if possible. “Tonight will again be difficult,” he wrote.

A member of the Ukrainian delegation to the talks, Mihailo Podolyak, said negotiators were seeking a cease-fire and an end to hostilities. Both sides, he said afterward, had “identified a number of priority topics in which certain solutions were outlined.”

Vladimir Medinsky, a former Kremlin culture minister who led the Russian delegation, said the negotiators had “found certain points where we can predict common positions,” and that a second meeting in Belarus would be held in the “coming days.”

Mr. Putin, who has called the Soviet Union’s collapse 30 years ago a disaster and has reminded the world twice in the past week that he commands a nuclear-armed state, has framed the Ukraine crisis as a struggle by Russia to protect itself from encroachment and threats by the NATO alliance.

In a telephone conference on Monday with President Emmanuel Macron of France, who has sought repeatedly to find a diplomatic end to the conflict, Mr. Putin said the Kremlin wants its security demands taken into account “unconditionally,” according to French officials. These include guarantees that Ukraine

will never join NATO and recognition of Russia's sovereignty over the Crimean peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Belarus has sought to portray itself as a neutral host for the talks, which were first announced on Sunday, but the country's authoritarian president, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, has not only aligned himself with Mr. Putin but also allowed the Russian leader to launch part of the invasion from the Belarus border, which is only 40 miles from Kyiv. There have also been reports that Belarusian troops may join the invasion.

Senator Murphy said he had been told in the classified briefing that the Russians have fallen behind their invasion timeline and that "there have been multiple Russian equipment and logistics failures." He added that it is believed that Russia will try to encircle and cut off Kyiv in the next several weeks and that the fight for the capital is expected to be "long and bloody."

Both Russia and Belarus were excoriated by Western diplomats on Monday at an emergency meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, which is expected to vote this week on a resolution that would condemn the Russian invasion. While such resolutions have no enforcement power, diplomats said they could help escalate the pressure on Russia to end the war.

The Russian ambassador to the United Nations, Vasily A. Nebenzya, rejected the criticism, telling fellow ambassadors that the Russian military actions in Ukraine were meant to protect the Donbas, the region in the east where Russia-backed separatists have been fighting for eight years. He accused the United States and its allies of "shamelessly inundating" Ukraine with weapons and inciting Ukrainians to fight.

"The Western countries have created a bubble that could not but pop," Mr. Nebenzya said.

The flow of Ukrainian refugees to neighbors since the Russian invasion has created backups at border crossings with Poland and Moldova. The United Nations refugee agency, which reported that 500,000 Ukrainians have fled so far, said it was expecting as many as four million to follow.

At least 36,000 Ukrainians have entered Moldova, a nation of 2.6 million that is among the poorest in Europe. The tiny country is better known for its rapid depopulation, not its appeal to refugees. And yet in recent days, it has been putting Ukrainians up at wineries, schools, a former coronavirus ward and even the home of a lawmaker.

"This is unprecedented, totally unprecedented," said the lawmaker, Dumitru Alaiba, who was hosting a refugee from Odessa. "It's magical what we see in terms of solidarity."

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HEADLINE	02/28 Putin tests China nuclear pact w/Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/28/putins-war-tests-chinas-nuclear-pact-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin's order raising the alert status of Russia's massive nuclear forces this week in the midst of an invasion of neighboring Ukraine is presenting a test of a 2012 agreement that calls on China to provide a nuclear deterrent umbrella for Kyiv.</p> <p>Chinese President Xi Jinping and then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich signed the agreement on Dec. 5, 2012, promising that China's nuclear forces would protect Ukraine from nuclear threats. The bilateral treaty described the two states as "strategic partners."</p> <p>"China pledges unconditionally not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against the nuclear-free Ukraine and China further pledges to provide Ukraine nuclear security guarantee when Ukraine encounters an invasion involving nuclear weapons or Ukraine is under threat of a nuclear invasion," a joint statement on the pact said.</p> <p>Headlines in the Chinese Communist Party-affiliated state media noted the accord, including a People's Daily headline that stated, "China offers Ukraine nuclear umbrella protection."</p>

Censors have since removed the articles, a possible reflection of the growing alliance between Beijing and Moscow.

Three years after achieving independence in 1991, Ukraine voluntarily gave up the nuclear weapons it inherited upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The arsenal would have been the third-largest held by any nation. Ukraine subsequently joined the global nuclear nonproliferation treaty as a non-weapons state.

Chinese Embassy spokesman Liu Pengyu declined to say whether China would provide Ukraine with security assurances under the 2012 nuclear umbrella agreement.

“I reiterate China’s consistent belief: A nuclear war cannot be won and mustn’t be fought,” he stated in an email. “China is closely following the development of the Ukraine situation and supports all efforts that are conducive to easing the situation and seeking political settlement.”

China has seen the statements on the nuclear issue and noted that all sides should exercise restraint and avoid further escalation, he said.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin was not asked about the China-Ukraine nuclear agreements during a press conference. Mr. Wang, however, said China would continue to develop cooperative ties with Ukraine based on “mutual respect and noninterference.

Asked about Mr. Putin’s order to raise the nuclear forces alert status, Mr. Wang repeated official comments that Russia had “legitimate security concerns” regarding NATO expansion that should be addressed.

As Russian military forces became mired in efforts to pacify Ukraine rapidly using a three-pronged military offensive, Mr. Putin said Sunday that “aggressive statements” by NATO prompted his directive.

“Western countries aren’t only taking unfriendly actions against our country in the economic sphere, but top officials from leading NATO members made aggressive statements regarding our country,” Mr. Putin said in comments broadcast on Russian television.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Monday that the Biden administration would not respond directly to Mr. Putin’s actions but cited concerns about escalating bellicose rhetoric from Russia.

“It is important to remember — even over the course of the last several months and years — when we had significant disagreements with Russia on several issues, the United States and Russia have long agreed that nuclear use will have devastating consequences,” she said.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said the announcement by Mr. Putin on nuclear forces is “as unnecessary as it is escalatory” and that officials are still reviewing and analyzing the order. A senior U.S. defense official said “nothing specific” had been detected that indicated an “appreciable or noticeable” higher alert by Russia’s nuclear forces.

“Secretary [of Defense Lloyd] Austin is comfortable with the strategic deterrent posture of the United States and our ability to defend the homeland and our allies and partners,” Mr. Kirby said, confirming Ms. Psaki’s comments.

‘Escalate to deescalate’

Mr. Putin’s nuclear alert fits with a new Russian military doctrine called “escalate to deescalate,” reflecting Moscow’s weaker conventional forces and large nuclear firepower. U.S. defense officials have said the doctrine means Russia’s military could more rapidly resort to the use of nuclear weapons, tactical nuclear arms or possibly strategic weapons in the case of a regional conflict like the Ukraine invasion.

Russia has four levels of nuclear force alerts, and analysts said it was not clear what level Mr. Putin ordered.

Signs of increased nuclear readiness would include loading bombers with nuclear weapons and dispatching ballistic missile submarines. Land-based missiles stay at higher alert status for launch in case an incoming missile is detected.

Earlier, a defense official said the United States “had no reason to doubt” the ordering of a higher nuclear alert status and said it was unnecessary because Russia is not facing any nuclear dangers from NATO or the West.

“And escalatory because it is clearly potentially putting at play forces that if there’s a miscalculation could — could — make things much, much more dangerous,” the official said.

China has tacitly supported the Russian military operation against Ukraine by not condemning the military operation and repeatedly insisting that Moscow had “legitimate security concerns” with Ukraine and NATO that the U.S. and its allies failed to address. Beijing abstained on a U.N. Security Council measure last week condemning Russia’s actions, a measure that failed when Moscow used its veto.

The Biden administration also shared U.S. intelligence with Chinese officials in the run-up to the conflict in a failed bid to gain Beijing’s support for pressure on Mr. Putin not to invade Ukraine. Instead of helping the West, China’s government shared the intelligence on Russian troop deployments with Moscow, highlighting the growing alliance between the two countries.

Mr. Wang, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, dismissed reports of sharing U.S. intelligence with Russia as “disinformation fabricated by the U.S. to smear China.”

The spokesman also called for all parties in the conflict to exercise restraint to prevent the war from “spiraling out of control.”

“We hope all parties will work with China to deescalate instead of fueling the tensions and promote diplomatic settlement rather than further escalation,” he said.

Ukraine developed a close arms relationship with China since it achieved independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

China bought an unfinished aircraft carrier from Ukraine for \$20 million in the 1990s and turned it into the People’s Liberation Army’s first aircraft carrier.

Ukraine also sold jets and aircraft engines to China and provided design information that was incorporated into Chinese Y-series military transport and surveillance aircraft.

Former State Department policy official Miles Yu, who first disclosed the China-Ukraine nuclear pact, said the nation most likely to threaten the use of nuclear weapons against Ukraine is Russia, another strategic partner of Beijing.

“In the hypothetical scenario of a Russian nuclear threat against Moscow’s former satellite Ukraine, would China keep its pledge to confront Moscow with its nuclear weapons?” Mr. Yu stated.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Russians feel economic pain amid war
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/28/russians-feel-economic-pain-war-grinds-ukraine/
GIST	Russian forces pounded civilian apartments in Ukraine and the Kremlin again raised the specter of nuclear war as the first diplomatic talks since the start of Russia’s 5-day-old invasion failed to produce a cease-fire Monday and the Russian economy staggered under a slew of Western economic and financial sanctions.

Russians were feeling the first real blowback from the invasion, even as Ukrainian forces continued to surprise Western military experts with the strength of their resistance and their ability — for now — to keep Kyiv and other major cities out of Russia's grasp.

The ruble's value plummeted on world currency exchanges Monday as the U.S. froze Russian central bank assets. Switzerland, whose banks have long been a shelter for Russian oligarch money, broke from its tradition of global neutrality to begin freezing Russian assets.

Russian President Vladimir Putin showed no sign of backing off his violent push to prevent the former Soviet republic from leaving Moscow's orbit and to push back the NATO military alliance from Eastern Europe. Despite the shaky start to the operation, military experts say Russia continues to hold a massive manpower and firepower advantage over its smaller neighbor.

Embattled but defiant Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy sought to solidify his country's ties to the democratic West by formally applying to join the European Union. The symbolic move was likely to anger Mr. Putin, who ordered Russia's land, air and sea nuclear forces to be placed on higher alert in a bid, he said, to warn off Western countries coming to Ukraine's aid in the fight.

The Russian army showed mounting signs that it had overextended itself less than a week after invading Ukraine.

Seth G. Jones, who heads the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said that if Moscow's advance continues to stall, its forces are likely to be "picked apart" by Ukrainian fighters unless they fundamentally revise the operation's methods and goals.

Russian forces are "in a precarious position if Ukraine becomes a protracted war," Mr. Jones wrote in a Twitter post late Sunday. "Assuming 150,000 Russian soldiers in Ukraine & a population of 44 million, that is a force ratio of 3.4 soldiers per 1,000 people. You can't hold territory with those numbers."

Former CIA senior officer Daniel Hoffman, who writes an analysis column for The Washington Times, told Fox News over the weekend that Russia has "overstretched" its military in Ukraine.

The Kremlin faced a mounting wall of resistance and few defenders.

The 193-nation U.N. General Assembly opened its first emergency session in decades to deal with the Ukraine invasion Monday. Assembly President Abdulla Shahid called for an immediate cease-fire, maximum restraint by all parties and "a full return to diplomacy and dialogue."

The Russian military has denied targeting residential areas despite Ukrainian videos online showing the shelling of homes, schools and hospitals. Stepping up his rhetoric, Mr. Putin denounced the U.S. and its allies as an "empire of lies."

Despite Mr. Putin's alarming talk about a "special combat status" for Russia's huge nuclear arsenal, a senior U.S. defense official said on background Monday that the United States had not seen any appreciable change in Russia's nuclear posture.

More than 500,000 have fled

Amid the maneuvering, the human cost of the war continued to mount for Ukrainians. U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said at least 102 civilians had been killed and hundreds wounded in more than four days of fighting. She warned that the figure is likely a significant undercount. Mr. Zelenskyy cited reports of at least 16 children among the dead.

Officials estimate that more than a half-million people have fled Ukraine since the invasion began. Many of them went to Poland, Romania and Hungary. Millions of others have become internally displaced as Russian forces rumble into the country from the north, south and east.

Russian troops have been advancing slowly on Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital city, which is home to nearly 3 million people and was rocked by several large explosions Monday. A huge Russian military convoy rumbling toward the city suggested the fighting there is likely to grow more intense over the coming days.

The worst violence Monday was reported in Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city. Online videos showed residential areas being shelled and apartment buildings shaken by powerful blasts just as a Ukrainian delegation was holding talks with Russian officials on the Ukraine-Belarus border.

Although the talks did not result in a cease-fire, The Associated Press reported that a top Putin aide and head of the Russian delegation, Vladimir Medinsky, said the meeting lasted nearly five hours and that the envoys "found certain points on which common positions could be foreseen." He said they agreed to continue the discussions in the coming days.

"The most important thing is that we agreed to continue negotiating," Mr. Medinsky told reporters.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said later on Twitter that "the Russian side, unfortunately, still has a very biased view of the destructive processes it has launched."

It remains to be seen how the mounting sanctions and economic pressure on Russia might affect the talks. Russians awoke to a reeling domestic economy, with the ruble losing nearly 30% of its value against the dollar and trading halted on the Russian stock market.

The situation forced Russia's central bank to hike interest rates to 20% from 9.5%. Russia's central bank acknowledged in a statement that "external conditions for the Russian economy have drastically changed."

"Due to the current situation, the Bank of Russia has decided not to open a stock market section, a derivatives market section, or a derivatives market section on the Moscow Exchange today," it said.

Photos circulating showed ordinary Russians lining up to withdraw cash from ATMs. The European subsidiary of Sberbank, Russia's biggest lender, faced failure after a run on deposits.

The Kremlin said Mr. Putin planned to hold emergency meetings with economic advisers as Russia's "fortress economy" faces major sanctions and the decision by the Group of Seven leading industrial nations to cut it off from the global SWIFT financial processing system.

The U.S. and other Western powers clamped down further Monday by restricting Moscow's ability to tap into the bulk of its \$640 billion in foreign currency reserves, a war chest Mr. Putin built up in recent years to make Moscow less vulnerable to outside economic pressure.

In yet another blow to Russia's economy, the oil giant Shell said it was pulling out of the country because of the Ukraine invasion. Shell said it would withdraw from its joint ventures with state-owned gas company Gazprom and other entities and end its involvement in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project between Russia and Europe.

Underscoring Western anger with the invasion of Ukraine, Switzerland waived its long-standing policy of neutrality and backed sanctions against Russia. "The Swiss Federal Council has decided today to fully adopt EU sanctions," Swiss Confederation President Ignazio Cassis said at a news briefing. "It is an unparalleled action of Switzerland, who has always stayed neutral before.

"Russia's attack is an attack on freedom, an attack on democracy, an attack on the civil population and an attack on the institutions of a free country," Mr. Cassis said. "This cannot be accepted regarding international law, this cannot be accepted politically and this cannot be accepted morally."

	<p>Strategic ports in Ukraine’s south came under assault from Russian forces. Mariupol, on the Sea of Azov, is “hanging on,” said Zelenskyy adviser Oleksiy Arestovich. An oil depot was reported bombed in the eastern city of Sumy. Ukrainian protesters demonstrated against encroaching Russian troops in the port of Berdyansk.</p> <p>Across Ukraine, terrified families huddled overnight in shelters, basements and corridors.</p> <p>“I sit and pray for these negotiations to end successfully so that they reach an agreement to end the slaughter, and so there is no more war,” said Alexandra Mikhailova, weeping as she clutched her cat in a makeshift shelter in the strategic southeastern port city of Mariupol. Around her, parents sought to console children and keep them warm.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Hollywood studios pause releases in Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/28/warner-bros-walt-disney-sony-pause-movie-releases/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK—Three major Hollywood studios have moved to pause their upcoming theatrical releases in Russia, including rolling out “The Batman” in theaters there this week.</p> <p>Warner Bros., the Walt Disney Co. and Sony Pictures said Monday that they would “pause” the release of their films in Russia. Each studio has significant upcoming releases that had been set to debut internationally in the coming weeks. “The Batman,” one of the year’s more anticipated films, launches Friday in North America and many overseas territories.</p> <p>Warner Bros.’ move closely followed a similar decision Monday by the Walt Disney Co. The studio had planned to open the Pixar film “Turning Red” in Russia on March 10. That film is going straight to Disney+ in the U.S.</p> <p>Sony followed suit, saying it would delay its release of the comic book film “Morbius” in Russia.</p> <p>Russia is not a leading market for Hollywood, but the country typically ranks in the top dozen countries globally in box office.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Gov. Covid state of emergency into 3rd year
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/gov-inslees-covid-state-of-emergency-passes-two-year-mark
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. - Governor Jay Inslee’s COVID-19 state of emergency now enters its third year in effect.</p> <p>Inslee issued the emergency order Feb. 29, 2020, which allowed him to mobilize the Washington National Guard, implement mask mandates, enact stay-home orders, fire state employees for not getting vaccinated, and determine phased reopening strategies in the state’s “Safe Start” and “Washington Ready” plans.</p> <p>During an incredibly dangerous pandemic, Inslee has exercised unilateral power with little legislative oversight, some state lawmakers say—and more are slowly unifying to limit those powers.</p> <p>It has been a long two years of mandates for Washington, which has maintained one of the lowest COVID infection rates and death rates in the U.S. The state also ranks among the highest vaccination rates in the country, according to data from the New York Times.</p> <p>Washington’s success can be attributed to widespread vaccinations and strict guidelines.</p> <p>But, state lawmakers are concerned with how little they are being consulted in these far-reaching mandates.</p>

"While we're glad to see Governor Inslee adjust his timeline for ending the statewide mask mandate to March 12, we're disappointed that there seems to be no end in sight for the one-man rule he has enjoyed," said Senate Republican Leader John Braun, and House Republican Leader J.T. Wilcox, "especially after the Democrat majority officially abdicated all legislative oversight of the emergency proclamations."

Republican legislators have complained the law that gives Gov. Inslee emergency powers never anticipated emergencies that lasted years.

"Tomorrow marks the start of the third year of the people being shut out of the decision-making process," said Braun and Wilcox. "As it stands now, we all have to just sit and wait until the governor decides he's ready to give up this power and restore balance to state government. And that does nothing but undermine everyone's trust in our state government."

Inslee has frequently stated he [does not intend to end the state of emergency](#) in the near future.

"We need this emergency order for the three reasons that I just articulated—we needed to protect hospitals so that people don't get sick from this still-deadly disease by requiring masks in hospitals," said Inslee [during a press conference Monday](#). "We needed to protect employees... and third, we needed to be able to keep federal funds, so we can get federal assistance, rather than state tax dollars."

Bills [HB 1772](#) in the House and [SB 5039](#) in the Senate suggest either a 60- or 30-day limit on the length of an emergency declaration, as long as the Legislature was not in session. Anything beyond that would require the legislature to be consulted before additional emergency declarations are made.

The Senate narrowly settled on a [90-day limitation with SB 5909](#).

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HEADLINE	02/28 Russia forces hit harder in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/world/europe/russia-ukraine-military.html
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — When Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine with nearly 200,000 troops, many observers — and seemingly President Vladimir V. Putin himself — expected that the force would roll right in and the fighting would be over quickly. Instead, after five days of war, what appears to be unfolding is a Russian miscalculation about tactics and about how hard the Ukrainians would fight.</p> <p>No major cities have been taken after an initial Russian push toward Kyiv, the capital, stalled. While Russia appeared to pull its punches, Ukraine marshaled and armed civilians to cover more ground, and its military has attacked Russian convoys and supply lines, leaving video evidence of scorched Russian vehicles and dead soldiers.</p> <p>But the war was already changing quickly on Monday, and ultimately, it is likely to turn on just how far Russia is willing to go to subjugate Ukraine. The Russian track record in the Syrian civil war, and in its own ruthless efforts to crush separatism in the Russian region of Chechnya, suggest an increasingly brutal campaign ahead.</p> <p>Signs of that appeared on Monday in Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, when Russia accelerated its bombardment of a residential district where heavy civilian casualties were reported, an attack that may have included cluster munitions, which are banned by many countries, but not Russia and Ukraine.</p> <p>"We're only in the opening days of this, and Putin has a lot of cards to play," said Douglas Lute, a former U.S. lieutenant general and ambassador to NATO. "It's too early to be triumphalist, and there are a lot of Russian capabilities not employed yet."</p> <p>Russian military doctrine toward taking cities is both grimly practical and deadly, favoring heavy artillery, missiles and bombs to terrify civilians and push them to flee, while killing defenders and destroying local infrastructure and communications before advancing on the ground.</p>

“Russia has not yet massed its military capability in an efficient way,” Mr. Lute said. “But the Russian doctrine of mass firing and no holds barred was visible in Chechnya, and there is the potential that Russia will get its act together tactically, and that will result in mass fire against population centers.”

Russian forces advancing toward Kyiv continue to face “creative and effective” resistance, according to a senior Pentagon official who briefed reporters on Monday. But Russia’s assault is in just the fifth day, and Russian commanders will likely learn from their failures and adapt, the official said, as Russian forces also did in Syria. American officials say they fear that Russia may now escalate missile and aerial bombing of cities with major civilian casualties, the official said.

Many experts say that Mr. Putin appeared to miscalculate in assuming that a quick strike on Kyiv could dislodge the government of President Volodymyr Zelensky, and that Ukrainians would stay largely indifferent. That explains, the experts suggest, why Russia went in lightly, seemingly trying to limit civilian casualties.

But the Ukrainians surprised the Russians with their defense, and an early effort to seize a Kyiv airport with a spearhead group, to allow reinforcements to fly in, failed badly.

Russia has seemed markedly restrained in its use of force and even clumsy in the early days, said Mathieu Boulègue, an expert in Russian warfare at Chatham House. “They were paying the price of their own rhetoric, that this was a defensive war against fascists and neo-Nazis,” he said. But now “we have an irritated Kremlin, and we haven’t seen yet what Russia has in store.”

The world is “starting to see stage two, when they go in with heavy artillery and ground troops, as they are doing in Kharkiv and Mariupol,” he said.

“I’m afraid this is really the beginning,” Mr. Boulègue said. “We can see a follow-on invasion with more experienced troops, with more forces, fewer precision-guided systems, more attrition, more carpet bombing and more victims.”

In their effort to take Kyiv quickly, based on “terribly flawed assumptions about Ukraine,” the Russians withheld much of their combat power and capabilities and “got a bloody nose in the early days of the war,” said Michael Kofman, director of Russia studies at CNA, a defense research institute.

“However, we are only at the beginning of this war, and much of the euphoric optimism about the way the first 96 hours have gone belies the situation on the ground and the reality that the worst may yet be to come,” he said.

Jack Watling, an expert in land warfare at the Royal United Services Institute, a defense research institution, returned from Ukraine 12 days ago and says he expects more pressure from Russian forces in the coming days. “The Russians have a lot of forces in Ukraine, and as they continue to advance in a steady pace, they can function in a combined way, and not as isolated tank columns, and they will apply a much higher level of firepower,” he said.

Analysts say they expect Russian forces to work to expand their hold on the pro-Russia, separatist enclaves of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, and to capture a land bridge to Crimea in the south, while pushing troops down from the north to try to encircle the main Ukrainian Army east of the Dnieper River. They are trying to surround Mariupol and take Kharkiv.

That encirclement would cut off the bulk of Ukraine’s forces from Kyiv and from easy resupply, the experts say, limiting the sustainability of organized resistance. Russian troops are also moving steadily toward Kyiv from three axes to try to surround it.

While Russian forces have had supply and logistical problems — in some cases stranding vehicles without fuel in the early days of the invasion — those of the Ukrainians are likely more severe. The Ukrainian

Army will start to run out of ammunition in a week, the experts suggest, and out of Stinger missiles and Javelin anti-tank missiles before then.

Countries belonging to NATO and the European Union are sending ammunition and Stinger and Javelin missiles into western Ukraine from Poland, a NATO member, through a still-open border. The European Union is even, for the first time, promising to reimburse member states up to 450 million euros for the purchase and supply of weapons and equipment like flak jackets and helmets to Ukraine.

But if the Russians cut off the cities, Mr. Watling said, it will be difficult to get those supplies to Ukrainian defenders. Russian helicopters are beginning to run interdiction flights near the Polish border, and more troops are likely to move down from Belarus to cut off supply routes from Poland, he said, especially if, as it seems likely, Belarusian troops enter the war.

Bad starts in previous conflicts did not keep Russia from prevailing, and often at a brutal cost.

In Syria, the Russians had early setbacks, bringing predictions of quagmire. Yet they adapted, using missiles, airpower and artillery while their allies mostly went in on the ground. From 2015 to the end of 2017, Russian airstrikes were estimated to have killed at least 5,700 civilians, a quarter of them children, according to the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights.

The two wars in Chechnya were especially brutal, destroying the capital, Grozny, and helping give Mr. Putin, then a new prime minister, a reputation for toughness. Many thousands died before Russia restored control and put a pro-Kremlin Chechen in charge.

To this point, Russia appears to have been restrained in Ukraine by the belief that “they could not turn Kyiv into Grozny and expect to govern the country,” Mr. Watling said. “But now we see the Kremlin approving demonstrative acts of extreme violence, starting in Kharkiv,” which has had severe shelling of civilian areas.

There have also been more shellings of Kyiv and Chernihiv, a city northeast of the capital.

“You don’t pacify a population that way and you lay the ground for insurgency,” Mr. Watling added.

That strategy also raises a question of morale, both among the Russian forces and the Russian public back home.

“A lot depends on how brutal the Russians are prepared to be,” said Ian Bond, foreign policy director for the Center for European Reform. “They can’t censor everything, so brutalizing Ukrainians for whom many Russians feel a connection may not be politically successful for Putin.”

At home, [Mr. Putin is facing an increasingly difficult position](#), the experts suggest. “He has another roll of the dice in the military campaign,” said Malcolm Chalmers, the deputy director of the Royal United Services Institute research group in Britain. “But if he fails in week two as badly as in week one, he will be under pressure to find some way out of this.”

The miscalculation of the early days has been reinforced by the impact of unexpectedly severe and coordinated Western sanctions, which have already [devalued the ruble](#) and promise further economic turmoil for many ordinary Russians.

There have already been some prominent Russian voices criticizing the war, and some demonstrations in Russian cities. Repressing those will not keep the reality of the war away from most Russians.

“Putin has miscalculated and put his hand in a mangle,” Mr. Watling said. “The war will go on, but a lot will depend on the character of the resistance” — whether it means fighting in the cities or, as many expect, it reverts to a partisan war. “But the Ukrainians will not give up,” he said.

	<p>Curtis M. Scaparrotti, a retired four-star Army general and supreme allied commander in Europe, said that Ukrainian soldiers “can’t match the Russian units, but they won’t fold, either.”</p> <p>The Ukrainians “have to survive and transition to an insurgency, a tough task to pull off,” he said in an email. “The Russians have to consolidate gains and control a big country with a hostile populace. Next few days will indicate how this may go. If it gets difficult, the Russians will get brutal.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Russians face anxieties of costly war
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/world/europe/russia-economy-sanctions-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>MOSCOW — For two decades under President Vladimir V. Putin, Russians reaped the bounties of capitalism and globalization: cheap flights, affordable mortgages, a plethora of imported gadgets and cars.</p> <p>On Monday, those perks of modern life were abruptly disappearing, replaced by a crush of anxiety as sanctions imposed by the West in retaliation for Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine rattled the foundations of Russia’s financial system.</p> <p>The ruble cratered, losing a quarter of its value, and the central bank shuttered stock trading in Moscow through Tuesday. The public rushed to withdraw cash from A.T.M.’s, and Aeroflot, the national airline, canceled all its flights to Europe after countries banned Russian planes from using their air space. Concern about travel was so great that some people rushed to book seats on the few international flights still operating.</p> <p>“I’ve become one concentrated ball of fear,” said the owner of a small advertising agency in Moscow, Azaliya Idrisova, 33. She said she planned to depart for Argentina in the coming days and was not sure whether her clients would still pay her.</p> <p>Compounding the pain was the decision by Western countries to restrict the Russian Central Bank’s access to much of its \$643 billion in foreign currency reserves, undoing some of the Kremlin’s careful efforts to soften the impact of potential sanctions and making it difficult for the bank to prop up the ruble.</p> <p>Other moves struck at the heart of critical Russian industries. Shell, a company that for years helped Russia profit from its energy riches, said it was exiting all its joint ventures with Gazprom, Russia’s largest state-owned natural gas company — following BP’s announcement Sunday it would sell its stake in the Russian state-run oil giant Rosneft. Volvo said it would stop production at its truck factory in Russia, and Mercedes-Benz said it would drop its partnership with a Russian truck maker.</p> <p>And in a sign of how the sanctions were hitting regular Russians in ways big and small, Apple Pay and Google Pay stopped working at many of Moscow’s subway turnstiles — the ones operated by a bank on the American sanctions list.</p> <p>For many Russians opposed to the war, those hardships paled in comparison to the moral cost of seeing their country launch an unprovoked invasion. Antiwar protests continued across Russia, with at least 411 people detained in 13 cities, according to OVD Info, a rights group that tallies arrests, for a total of at least 6,435 detentions since last Thursday.</p> <p>But the financial jolt offered tangible evidence of the West’s outrage, one that is now washing over Russia’s economy with unpredictable consequences.</p> <p>The sanctions announced by the European Union and the United States over the weekend, J.P. Morgan analysts wrote to clients on Monday, “are more severe and wider than even the more extreme sanctions we had believed were in play just a month ago.” By Monday evening, the European Union had added more Russian business tycoons to its sanctions list, including two owners of Alfa Bank, Mikhail Fridman and Petr Aven, who had cut a relatively Western-friendly image.</p>

Some analysts worried that the wide-ranging sanctions, combined with Ukraine's ferocious resistance on the battlefield, could lead Mr. Putin to escalate the crisis. The Defense Ministry issued a statement saying that the bombers, submarines and land-based launchers that make up Russia's nuclear "triad" had been put on "enhanced combat duty," as Mr. Putin had ordered on Sunday. Rumors circulated that men could be called up if the military got bogged down in Ukraine.

"I realized that this government has gone utterly mad," said Ivan Petrov, 28, a Moscow machine learning engineer who flew to the Egyptian resort of Hurghada over the weekend, fearing the war in Ukraine could escalate to the point that he might get drafted. His next goal: Find a job in the West.

"Earning in rubles seems absolutely pointless," Mr. Petrov said.

On Monday, the sanctions' full force hit Russia's already stagnant economy.

Russia's Central Bank, its reserves largely frozen, more than doubled its key rate to 20 percent to try to stabilize the ruble. A dollar cost more than 110 rubles at kiosks in Moscow on Monday compared with about 80 a week earlier, potentially devaluing people's savings given the likely increase in the price of imported goods. In trading in London, shares of Sberbank, Russia's largest bank, lost three-quarters of their value. The vice president of the country's real estate agents' association declared that Russians could say "goodbye to the mortgage."

To stem the flight of capital, Mr. Putin on Monday signed an order rolling back some of the free-market capitalism that had integrated post-Soviet Russia into the world economy. Russian exporters were required to convert 80 percent of their foreign-currency revenues since Jan. 1 into rubles; residents of Russia were banned from depositing money into accounts outside the country.

Mr. Putin called an emergency meeting on the economy with senior officials, in which he repeated his reference last week to the West as an "empire of lies."

"Our financial system and our economy have collided with a totally non-standard situation," Elvira Nabiullina, the head of the Central Bank, said afterward.

In a stark sign of the fury in the West over Russia's attack on Ukraine, even Switzerland — a favorite destination and banking hub of Russian oligarchs and senior Kremlin officials — ditched its traditional neutrality and joined in European sanctions, including personal ones against Mr. Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov.

There were signs of anger in the elite, though not among the security establishment closest to Mr. Putin. Ms. Nabiullina, who has said in the past that her outfit choices are meant to send messages, wore funereal black. Oleg Deripaska, a sanctioned metals tycoon close to the Kremlin, wrote on social media that he wanted to know "who's really going to pay for this whole party." Vyacheslav Markhayev, a lawmaker from Siberia, declared that the Kremlin "hid plans to start a full-scale war against our closest neighbor."

"Countries should spend money on treating people, on research to defeat cancer, and not on war," Oleg Tinkov, the billionaire founder of one of Russia's biggest consumer banks, wrote on Instagram.

Stanislav Usaty, owner of a marketing agency in St. Petersburg, said he expected to lose many of his clients because of the higher exchange rate, especially companies selling imports; he said he would probably need to lay off staff. Aleksandra Gridina, the owner of a travel agency in the city, said she would need to raise prices for international tours that her clients had already booked.

"It's a catastrophe for our business," she said.

Still, while there was confusion at the subway turnstiles and lines formed at A.T.M.'s and banks, there was no full-fledged financial panic among the general public. And it was far from clear whether the sanctions would help turn more Russians against the war — or whether they would only increase their resentment of

	<p>the West, confirming the Kremlin narrative that the United States and Europe were determined to dismantle their country.</p> <p>“Times change, much has happened, but one thing has not changed,” a reporter on the state-run news channel Rossiya 24 said on Sunday. “When a united Europe tried to destroy Russia, this always ended up bringing about the opposite result.”</p> <p>The backbone of Mr. Putin’s power is made up of security officials who rarely leave Russia and stand to gain from greater state control over the economy. In the broader public, he draws his core support from pensioners and state employees, who are less sensitive to economic volatility than those in the private sector.</p> <p>Shopping for groceries in Moscow on Monday, Valentina V. Petrova, 85, who said she used to work on Russia’s Proton space rockets, said the economic troubles did not faze her.</p> <p>“I think the president did everything right,” she said.</p> <p>Mr. Petrov, the engineer who flew to Egypt, said his parents also supported the war. And older Russians, he noted, had seen their share of ups and downs.</p> <p>“They survived many other Russian crises,” he said. “They’re calm about this.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Initial Ukraine, Russia talks inconclusive
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/world/europe/ukraine-russia-talks-belarus.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Initial talks between Russia and Ukraine concluded without result on Monday evening, with both delegations returning from the site of the negotiations in Belarus to their capitals for consultations.</p> <p>Kyiv is seeking a cease-fire in Ukraine and an end to hostilities, according to Mihailo Podolyak, a member of the Ukrainian delegation.</p> <p>“The parties identified a number of priority topics in which certain solutions were outlined,” he said after the discussions ended. “In order to get some opportunities for implementation and logistical solutions, the parties are returning to their capitals for consultations.”</p> <p>The Kremlin wants its security demands taken into account “unconditionally,” President Vladimir V. Putin told the French president, Emmanuel Macron, as talks were underway. Those include the recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea, and “demilitarizing and denazifying the Ukrainian state and ensuring its neutral status,” meaning that it gives up a right to join the NATO alliance.</p> <p>Vladimir Medinsky, a former culture minister who led the Russian delegation, said that the parties had “found certain points where we can predict common positions.”</p> <p>He said the next meeting would take place once more along the Ukraine-Belarus border in the “coming days.”</p> <p>After the meeting ended, Mr. Podoloyak criticized his opponents in a tweet, saying “Unfortunately, the Russian side is still extremely biased regarding the destructive processes it launched.”</p> <p>On Monday, dozens of people were killed and many more wounded in an attack by Russian rockets on Ukraine’s second-biggest city, Kharkiv. As news broke that the negotiations had concluded for the day, explosions were also heard in Kyiv.</p> <p>While the talks were ongoing, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine signed an application for membership in the European Union.</p>

	<p>“Pretty sure this is real,” he wrote on his Instagram page, where he shared a photo of the signing ceremony.</p> <p>Earlier in the day, in an impassioned speech, he urged the 27-member bloc to pave a swift path to accession.</p> <p>“We appeal to the European Union for Ukraine’s immediate accession under a new special procedure,” Mr. Zelensky said in a video broadcast from the capital, Kyiv. “Our goal is to stand alongside all Europeans and, most importantly, to stand on their level.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Pfizer shot less effective in younger kids
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/health/pfizer-vaccine-kids.html
GIST	<p>The coronavirus vaccine made by Pfizer-BioNTech is much less effective in preventing infection in children ages 5 to 11 years than in older adolescents or adults, according to a large new set of data collected by health officials in New York State — a finding that has deep ramifications for these children and their parents.</p> <p>The Pfizer vaccine is the only Covid shot authorized for that age group in the United States. It still prevents severe illness in the children, but offers virtually no protection against infection, even within a month after full immunization, the data, which were collected during the Omicron surge, suggest.</p> <p>The sharp drop in the vaccine’s performance in young children may stem from the fact that they receive one-third the dose given to older children and adults, researchers and federal officials who have reviewed the data said.</p> <p>The findings, which were posted online on Monday, come on the heels of clinical trial results indicating that the vaccine fared poorly in children aged 2 to 4 years, who received an even smaller dose.</p> <p>Experts worried that the news would further dissuade hesitant parents from immunizing their children. Other studies have shown the vaccine was not powerfully protective against infection with the Omicron variant in adults, either.</p> <p>“It’s disappointing, but not entirely surprising, given this is a vaccine developed in response to an earlier variant,” said Eli Rosenberg, deputy director for science at the New York State Department of Health, who led the study. “It looks very distressing to see this rapid decline, but it’s again all against Omicron.”</p> <p>Still, he and other public health experts said they recommend the shot for children given the protection against severe disease shown even in the new data set.</p> <p>“We need to make sure we emphasize the doughnut and not the hole,” said Dr. Kathryn M. Edwards, a pediatric vaccine expert at Vanderbilt University.</p> <p>In their study, Dr. Rosenberg and his colleagues analyzed data from 852,384 newly fully vaccinated children aged 12 to 17 years and 365,502 children aged 5 to 11 years between Dec. 13, 2021, and Jan. 31, 2022, the height of the Omicron surge.</p> <p>The vaccine’s effectiveness against hospitalization declined to 73 percent from 85 percent in the older children. In the younger children, effectiveness dropped to 48 percent from 100 percent. But because few children were hospitalized, these estimates have wide margins of error.</p> <p>The numbers for protection from infection are more reliable. Vaccine effectiveness against infection in the older children decreased to 51 percent from 66 percent. But in the younger children, it dropped sharply to just 12 percent from 68 percent.</p>

The numbers change drastically between ages 11 and 12. During the week ending Jan. 30, the vaccine's effectiveness against infection was 67 percent in 12-year-olds but just 11 percent in 11-year-old children. "The difference between the two age groups is striking," said Florian Krammer, an immunologist at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

The biological difference between the two ages is likely to be minimal, but while 12-year-old children got 30 micrograms of the vaccine — the same dose given to adults — children who were 11 received only 10 micrograms, he noted.

"This is super interesting because it would almost suggest that it's the dose that makes the difference," he added. "The question is how to fix that."

There have been at least [851 deaths involving Covid-19](#) in children under 17, and nearly 7,000 cases of [multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children](#), a rare but serious condition associated with Covid. More children were hospitalized during the Omicron surge than at any other point in the pandemic.

The findings underscore the need to gather more information on the best dose, number and timing for the shots given to children, Dr. Rosenberg said. They also underscore vaccines as just one measure of protection from the virus, along with masks and social distancing, he said.

Dr. Rosenberg's research was posted just days after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released [new recommendations](#) that would allow the majority of Americans to stop wearing masks, including in schools.

The new data also raises important questions about the Biden administration's strategy for vaccinating children. Only about one in four children aged 5 to 11 years has received [two doses of the vaccine](#). (The C.D.C. has not yet recommended booster doses for this age group.)

The vaccine has not yet been authorized for children younger than 5. Scientific advisers to the Food and Drug Administration were scheduled to meet on Feb. 15 to evaluate two doses of the vaccine for the youngest children, while three doses were still being tested. But the meeting was postponed after Pfizer submitted additional data suggesting two doses were not strongly protective against the Omicron variant of the virus.

Dr. Rosenberg briefed top C.D.C. officials, including Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, the agency's director, with findings in early February. F.D.A. leaders learned of the data around the same time. Some federal scientists pushed for the data to be made public ahead of the F.D.A. expert meeting scheduled for Feb. 15, viewing it as highly relevant to the discussion about dosing in children under 5, federal officials and others familiar with their responses to it said.

The data is generally consistent with a [report from Britain](#) showing that vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic infection in adolescents aged 12 to 17 years drops to 23 percent after two months. The C.D.C. has been compiling its own data on the vaccine's effectiveness in younger children and is expected to release at least some of it as early as this week, according to people familiar with the agency's plans.

Israeli researchers have also been assessing the vaccine's performance in young children since the country made it available to them in November.

"We continue to study and assess real-world data from the vaccine," Amy Rose, a spokeswoman for Pfizer, said in response to queries about the new data.

Dr. Philip Krause, who recently retired from the F.D.A. as a senior vaccine regulator, said assumptions about certain antibody levels being predictive of vaccine effectiveness should be re-evaluated in light of the new results.

“It certainly weakens the argument for mandating that people get that lower dose,” he said.

It is not unusual for experts to revisit the dosing and interval for pediatric vaccines as more evidence becomes available. But in this case, giving the children a higher dose to kick up the immune response may not be an option because some data suggest that it may cause too many fevers, an unwelcome and potentially dangerous side effect in young children.

There are other alternatives that may improve immunity in young children, said Deepta Bhattacharya, an immunologist at the University of Arizona.

Pfizer and BioNTech are testing a third dose in children under 5, as well as in those aged 5 to 11, with the idea that, as in adults, an extra shot may significantly augment immunity. Results from these trials are expected in several weeks. Studies in adults suggest that three doses of the vaccine were more protective against the Omicron variant than two doses.

Dr. Bhattacharya said he and his wife spaced the two doses for their children, who are 8 and 10, by eight weeks rather than the currently recommended three, based on studies suggesting that a longer gap between doses may improve protection. The C.D.C. last week [encouraged some people older than 12](#), especially boys and men between 12 to 39 years, to wait eight weeks between the first and second shot.

Another option may be a version of the vaccine designed to thwart the Omicron variant, or one that has a mix of several variants. Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson are all testing Omicron-specific versions of their vaccines.

The next variant may differ widely from Omicron, much as Omicron did from the Delta variant. But training the body to recognize multiple versions would still offer a better chance at preventing infection with newer forms of the virus. “Deciding when and how best to update these vaccines, I think that’s really still the key conversation going forward here,” Dr. Bhattacharya said.

Newer vaccines that use different approaches than the ones currently authorized in the United States may also work better for children. A protein-based vaccine made by Novavax is under review at the F.D.A., and the pharmaceutical companies Sanofi and GSK said this month that they plan to submit their vaccine for evaluation soon.

Many parents want to vaccinate their children to prevent them from spreading the virus to vulnerable relatives, to keep them in school or to avoid the possibility of long Covid, the poorly understood set of lingering symptoms that can occur even after a mild infection. Experts acknowledged that the vaccine’s low effectiveness against infection does not ease those concerns.

Still, the vaccines “provide more protection than we think,” said Jessica Andriesen, a vaccine data expert at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle.

“They may also make it so that your kid who brings home Covid isn’t shedding virus as much as they would be if they weren’t vaccinated, and they also may have it for a shorter amount of time,” she said.

The virus is here to stay, and children’s risk of severe outcomes increases with age. So inoculating children early is a good idea, said Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and an adviser to the F.D.A.

“The argument I make to parents when I talk to them about this vaccine is, your children are going to grow up,” he said. “They’re going to need to be protected against this virus for years.”

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HEADLINE	02/28 Officials fortify the Capitol: State of Union
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/us/politics/capitol-security-sotu-truck-convoy.html

WASHINGTON — Officials have ramped up security around the Capitol to levels not seen in months before [President Biden's State of the Union address set for Tuesday](#), as lawmakers brace for planned convoys of protesting truck drivers descending on Washington.

With the pro-Trump mob violence of a year ago still fresh in many minds and lawmakers [facing a surge in threats](#), officials erected a perimeter fence around the Capitol, dispatched National Guard troops and positioned military vehicles and police cars at strategic locations on streets near Congress. The U.S. Capitol Police said they would close 18 different stretches of Washington roads to motorists.

“We are prepared to take swift law enforcement actions for violations of our local and federal laws if necessary,” Robert J. Contee III, the chief of Washington’s Metropolitan Police Department, said at a Monday news conference where he was flanked by Mayor Muriel Bowser and federal law enforcement officials. He pledged increased staffing and “enhanced” security around the city.

The security fence was erected in January of last year after a mob of former President Donald J. Trump’s supporters stormed the Capitol, but was removed in July, reopening public accessibility to the complex. It was briefly restored in September in preparation for a right-wing rally in support of those arrested in connection with the Jan. 6 attack.

A convoy of truck drivers headed to Washington to protest vaccine mandates has raised alarms once again.

A Department of Homeland Security intelligence bulletin, obtained by The New York Times, said the caravans would “likely present public safety challenges for first responders if the convoys are of substantial size” and warned that some domestic extremists “probably will be drawn to the event and could engage in premeditated or opportunistic violence.”

At the news conference on Tuesday, Sean Gallagher, the acting assistant chief of the Capitol Police, said the perimeter fence was temporary and had been put up out of an “abundance of caution.” He suggested that it would be removed soon after Mr. Biden’s speech should no security issues materialize.

The State of the Union always draws intense security, given that it puts the members of all three branches of government — the president and his cabinet, members of the House and Senate and the justices of the Supreme Court — together in the same room. But security officials said they were on especially high alert this year.

Despite warnings from an organizer that [“tens of thousands” of truck drivers would converge](#) on the nation’s Capitol, it was unclear whether the convoys of truck drivers protesting Covid-19 mandates would, in fact, materialize or when they might arrive, officials said.

“Sometimes you don’t know what you don’t know,” Chief Contee said of when the protesters might arrive, adding: “While we expect the best, we always plan for the worst. So we have resources that are deployed — very much coordinating with all of our federal partners here — to make sure that we have a safe State of the Union and peaceful First Amendment assembly whatever day it shows up.”

The National Guard, which sent thousands of soldiers to the Capitol last year after Jan. 6 until May, once again deployed troops to the city in recent days.

The Defense Department authorized about 400 unarmed members of the District of Columbia National Guard and 50 large tactical vehicles to be placed at designated traffic posts on a 24-hour basis before Mr. Biden’s speech. The department also authorized up to 300 National Guard members from outside Washington to assist at designated traffic posts and select Capitol entry points. Philadelphia police have also supplied officers to help with security.

Despite the increased security, the House chamber will offer a more normal backdrop for Mr. Biden than [last year’s speech](#), which was given under intense pandemic restrictions. Citing a drop in

	<p>coronavirus cases across Washington, Dr. Brian P. Monahan, the attending physician at the Capitol, said masks would no longer be required in the House, making the practice optional regardless of vaccination status for the first time in more than a year.</p> <p>There are still some limitations: There will be virtual guests rather than in-person, because the House gallery overlooking the floor will be used to seat lawmakers and keep them socially distanced, according to a memo issued by William J. Walker, the House sergeant-at-arms, and there will be coronavirus health screenings. Lawmakers, staff and reporters will also need to show proof of a negative coronavirus test taken a day before the event.</p> <p>And instead of transforming Statuary Hall into a frenzy of lights and cameras ready to catch reactions to the speech, those cameras will be set up across office buildings and elsewhere in the Capitol to catch lawmakers eager to weigh in on the president's remarks.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Congo court sidelines China mining firm
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/world/congo-cobalt-mining-china.html
GIST	<p>A court in the Democratic Republic of Congo has sidelined the Chinese owner of one of the world's largest copper and cobalt mines, a major victory for the Congolese government as it seeks to become a bigger player in the global clean energy revolution.</p> <p>The ruling, which removes Chinese leadership of the mine for at least six months, stems from a dispute over billions of dollars in payments the Congolese government says it is owed by the Chinese owner, China Molybdenum.</p> <p>Backed by Chinese government financing, the company bought the Tenke Fungurume mine in 2016 from an Arizona-based mining company. The mine figures prominently in the Chinese government's effort to dominate major supply chains for minerals and metals needed in the production of batteries for electric vehicles.</p> <p>Cobalt is essential for electric vehicles because it extends battery range. It is now trading at a three-year high.</p> <p>The New York Times reported in November that employees at the mine had complained about a dramatic decline in worker safety under the Chinese ownership, including claims by safety inspectors that workers had been assaulted after raising concerns and been offered bribes to cover up accidents. The company disputed those claims, suggesting they were part of a broader effort to discredit it.</p> <p>Congo's president, Felix Tshisekedi, last year named a commission to investigate allegations that China Molybdenum might have cheated the Congolese government out of royalty payments from the mine. The legal action on Monday, by the Commercial Court of Lubumbashi, came after the country's state-owned mining enterprise had sought the removal of the mine's Chinese management.</p> <p>The court ruling, reviewed by The Times, leaves a third-party administrator in charge of the mine for at least six months, as auditors evaluate the allegations against the company. The state mining enterprise, known as Gécamines, asserts that China Molybdenum failed to declare hundreds of thousands of tons of copper and cobalt reserves buried at the site, depriving the agency of significant annual payments required when new reserves are found and verified.</p> <p>During the review period, Gécamines will retain its 20 percent stake in the mine, which was the world's second-largest source of cobalt in 2020. Congo last year produced 70 percent of the world's cobalt.</p> <p>President Tshisekedi's office declined on Monday to comment on the ruling. China Molybdenum did not respond to a request for comment, but in the past it has denied that it concealed reserves or owed any additional royalties.</p>

Congo has a history of threatening legal action against foreign mining companies; in some instances the threats were resolved when the companies made payments to government officials, a process that some mining industry executives described as a shakedown.

In this case, executives at both Gécamines and the mine have told The Times that the claims against China Molybdenum are based on legitimate concerns about its operations and a belief that the company has been improperly hiding information.

The court on Monday named Sage Ngoie, a Congolese engineer who until recently served as a project manager at the mine, as the new temporary mine administrator.

Dr. Ngoie worked at Tenke for two years overseeing waste disposal and other major engineering tasks and had been recently appointed to a new management role. In a telephone interview, he said he was not prepared to describe changes he might make at the mine, which is one of the largest employers in Congo, with more than 7,000 employees and contractors.

According to the ruling, the court entrusted Dr. Ngoie “with the task of reconciling the two partners on divergent issues,” including “access to technical information and the determination of the rights of the parties to the mining reserves.” It also gave him the authority to make decisions related to mine operations and the sale of its copper and cobalt. Currently, a vast majority of the mine’s cobalt is exported to China.

Congolese government officials are conducting a broader examination of contracts signed with Chinese-backed mining companies after complaints of promises unfulfilled to Congo, a nation trying to regain its economic footing after devastating civil war and years of corrupt leadership. As of 2020, Chinese-backed companies owned or had a financial stake in 15 of Congo’s 19 cobalt-producing mines.

Mr. Tshisekedi has said that too much of the profits from the nation’s metals and minerals — increasingly in demand as the world weans itself from fossil fuels — fail to benefit the Congolese.

U.S. officials have separately raised alarms that China could control the supply chain for cobalt and drive up battery prices, a prospect that troubles auto manufacturers that have pledged to convert fleets away from the combustion engine in coming years.

“China has a sort of a stranglehold on the supply chain,” said Tiffin Caverly, a vice president at the Export-Import Bank of the United States, which held a hearing last week about metals needed for renewable energy and military applications. “Unfortunately, I’ll say I don’t have an answer for how you break that supply chain advantage that China has built. Other than to say it is, it is absolutely an issue.”

Biden administration officials have been looking for ways to strengthen ties with Congo and gain access to critical resources like cobalt. In February, a delegation of White House officials flew to Kinshasa, the capital, for meetings with Mr. Tshisekedi and other top officials. The U.S. government is backing the review of mining contracts in Congo as part of an effort to crack down on corruption.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Russia faces global sports crackdown
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/sports/olympics/international-olympic-committee-russia-belarus.html
GIST	<p>An article of faith in global sports — that athletes should not be punished for the actions of their governments — crumbled on Monday, when executives worldwide moved to banish Russians from competitions and deepen the country’s isolation for its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The International Olympic Committee recommended that athletes from Russia and Belarus, which has allowed Russian troops to use its territory, be barred from events. FIFA, soccer’s international governing body, effectively blocked Russia from qualifying for this year’s men’s World Cup. And the International Ice Hockey Federation said Russian and Belarusian teams would be forbidden at its competitions,</p>

including this year's world championships, and the National Hockey League suspended its business dealings in Russia.

Although there were scattered loopholes and uncertainties, the penalties amounted to a bracing rebuke of Moscow and Minsk by a sports world that has long labored furiously, if sometimes unconvincingly, to depict competition as separate from politics.

The International Paralympic Committee is expected to decide on Wednesday whether to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete in the Paralympic Games, which are scheduled to open in Beijing on Friday.

But the day's events left little doubt that Russia and Belarus, which had already drawn scrutiny for doping violations and oppression, would become further separated from the wider athletic world.

"This will continue to be a contest of two different visions of what sport is and who is allowed to participate in and control sport," said Andrés Martínez, a research scholar at Arizona State University's Global Sport Institute. "I think this is a bit of a reset, though, in that it does set an important precedent and a standard that sporting federations cannot continue to act with impunity and just let the highest bidder dictate what happens in sport, oblivious to other considerations, including the behavior of those highest bidders."

The most potentially far-reaching consequence on Monday came from the I.O.C., which cited "the integrity of global sports competitions" and "the safety of all the participants" when it recommended that Russian and Belarusian athletes be blocked from competitions.

"While athletes from Russia and Belarus would be able to continue to participate in sports events, many athletes from Ukraine are prevented from doing so because of the attack on their country," the I.O.C. said in a statement, which noted that it issued its recommendation "with a heavy heart."

It will fall to event organizers and the federations that administer individual sports to decide how, or if, to adopt the I.O.C.'s recommendation, which the committee suggested might not be enforced "on short notice for organizational or legal reasons."

That qualifier appeared to be a nod to the imminence of the Paralympic Games, which have been expected to draw more than 70 athletes from Russia and about a dozen from Belarus.

The International Paralympic Committee did not immediately respond to a request for comment, nor did Belarusian officials or the Russian Paralympic Committee. But Stanislav Pozdnyakov, the president of the Russian Olympic Committee, said in a statement that he and other Russian officials "strongly" objected to the I.O.C. recommendation, which he said contradicted "the spirit of the Olympic movement, which should unite and not divide."

The I.O.C.'s recommendation came hours before FIFA announced that it had suspended Russia and its teams from all competitions and ejected the country from qualifying for the 2022 World Cup only weeks before it was to play for one of Europe's final places in this year's tournament.

FIFA, which had come under pressure for its initial hesitance to bar Russia from competition, and its European counterpart, UEFA, said the ban on Russia would be in place "until further notice."

"Football is fully united here and in full solidarity with all the people affected in Ukraine," FIFA said in a statement. Ukraine's team, which is set to play Scotland in its own World Cup playoff in March, will remain in the competition.

UEFA, which has decided to move this year's Champions League final to St.-Denis, France, from St. Petersburg, Russia, then went a step further in breaking its deep ties to Russia: It announced that it had

ended a sponsorship agreement with the Russian energy giant Gazprom. The deal was worth a reported \$50 million a year to European soccer.

It was unclear whether FIFA's decision to bar Russia would face a court challenge. Russia and some of its athletes have successfully fought exclusion from other events, including the Olympic Games, by getting punishments watered down through appeals to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Any efforts to keep Russian athletes out of other competitions could also spark legal battles. Pozdnyakov, the Russian Olympic Committee chairman, said Russian officials intended to "consistently defend the rights and interests of Russian athletes and provide all necessary assistance to our national sports federations to challenge discriminatory decisions."

Some penalties could be harder to fight than others.

Hockey executives in the Czech Republic, Finland and Sweden said Monday that Russia would not be allowed to participate in this year's Euro Hockey Tour, and executives signaled that they were looking to replace Russia permanently.

That decision turned out to be just one blow to Russia, which won the silver medal in men's hockey in Beijing. By day's end, the hockey federation announced an indefinite ban on Russian and Belarusian squads and said it would not stage its junior world championship in Russia starting later this year.

Soon after, the N.H.L. said it had paused its ties with business partners in Russia and halted its online presence in the Russian language. It also said it would not consider Russia as a prospective host "for any future competitions involving the N.H.L."

Federations around the world were also grappling with how to apply the I.O.C.'s recommendation in individual sports and competitions in which athletes compete more for themselves than for their nations.

In cross-country skiing, Natalia Nepryaeva of Russia holds the top spot in the World Cup standings but could lose that ranking if she cannot participate in several coming races.

Tennis has the complexity of seven ruling organizations. On the same day the I.O.C. recommended the ban, Daniil Medvedev, a Russian, took over the top sport in the men's world rankings.

The ATP Tour heralded the achievement on its website with a picture of Medvedev next to the Russian flag. However, Medvedev moved to Monaco years ago and has campaigned for peace on his social media channels.

The ATP Tour made no immediate announcement about whether it would follow the I.O.C. recommendation, nor did the WTA, which manages the women's professional tour and has three players from Russia and Belarus in the top 20, including Victoria Azarenka, who is on the organization's board.

On Monday, Elina Svitolina, a top player from Ukraine and the top seed this week in a tournament in Mexico, announced on Twitter that she will not play her first-round match against Anastasia Potapova of Russia unless the governing bodies of tennis follow the I.O.C.'s guidance.

Although Monday's maneuvers against Russia were particularly forceful, the country has clashed with sports executives in recent years over its reliance on a state-run doping operation. Still, Russian athletes and teams had faced the most marginal of consequences. At the Beijing Olympics, which ended Feb. 20, Russian athletes appeared as members of the "Russian Olympic Committee," and did not formally compete under the Russian tricolor flag or hear the Russian national anthem at medal ceremonies.

And Olympic officials previously barred the Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, from I.O.C. events, including the Beijing Games. Olympic officials complained then that Belarusian athletes were "not appropriately protected" from what they described as "political discrimination."

Monday's wave of condemnation, though, was far broader and came after days of swelling anger among sports executives and demands from political leaders and athletes alike. Last week, Olympic executives pressed federations to cancel or move competitions from Belarus and Russia.

Vladimir V. Putin, the president of Russia, who has long heralded the role of sports in his own life and the role of athletics in his country's ambitions, has also increasingly come under personal pressure. The International Judo Federation recently suspended him from his role as its honorary president, and World Taekwondo rescinded the honorary black belt it gave him in 2013.

On Monday, the I.O.C. withdrew its highest honor from Putin, who received it in 2001. He attended the opening ceremony of the Beijing Games on Feb. 4, when his forces were massing at the Ukrainian border ahead of their invasion.

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HEADLINE	02/28 WA indoor mask mandate ends 9 days early
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/washington-mask-mandate-march-12/281-34fb5057-3cae-4135-9e65-8d46d32d5344
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash — Gov. Jay Inslee announced Monday that Washington state is lifting its indoor mask mandate on March 12 and not March 21.</p> <p>The masking requirements will be lifted at 11:59 p.m. on March 11 and come as a result of the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released last week.</p> <p>King County announced that it would also be ending its mask mandate at 11:59 p.m. on March 11.</p> <p>"We've continued to monitor data from our state Department of Health (DOH), and have determined we are able to adjust the timing of our statewide mask requirement. While this represents another step forward for Washingtonians, we must still be mindful that many within our communities remain vulnerable. Many businesses and families will continue choosing to wear masks because we've learned how effective they are at keeping one another safe. As we transition to this next phase, we will continue to move forward together carefully and cautiously," Inslee said in a statement.</p> <p>The CDC updated its masking guidance on Friday, saying that only counties with high transmission levels should continue to wear masks inside most places.</p> <p>According to the CDC's map, all but nine counties in Washington fall into this category. Previously, the CDC had recommended masks in all communities regardless of transmission levels.</p> <p>King County, the state's most populous, is currently classified as low transmission.</p> <p>Health leaders from Washington, Oregon and California discussed the guidance over the weekend and determined the new date. California is lifting its mask mandate on March 1, while Oregon and Washington are both lifting theirs by March 12.</p> <p>The indoor mask requirements for Washington schools will ease and become recommendations on March 12, but the DOH is expected to release further guidance for schools next week. King County said it would not be extending any mask mandates for schools once the state's requirements ease.</p> <p>Inslee on Monday also gave three reasons for why he isn't yet ending the emergency order that has given him additional powers during the pandemic.</p> <p>First, he said the order allows a mask mandate at hospitals. It also protects individuals' rights to use masks at work if they choose to. Finally, it allows the state to continue receiving federal funding.</p>

	<p>The CDC's guidance eased mask recommendations for more than 70% of Americans, but universal masking is still required in airports, on airplanes, buses and other forms of public transit.</p> <p>Washington's previous target date of March 21 was chosen since it was the date the state said COVID hospital admission rates would hit 5 per 100,000 residents.</p> <p>As of Feb. 25, the statewide COVID hospitalization rate is about 13 admissions per 100,000 residents. Officials have urged residents to be patient as some businesses may choose to keep mask requirements even after the mandate lifts.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Spokane police not sold on Tesla cruisers
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/community/spokane-police-react-negatively-tesla-cruisers/293-bd108ebe-23fe-484f-9428-1553c078a55d
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The Spokane Police Department (SPD) has been testing out the Tesla Model Y as a police cruiser.</p> <p>So far, the feedback has been less than ideal.</p> <p>Most of SPD's fleet of patrol vehicles are gas-powered or hybrids made specifically for police work. According to Spokane City Council President Breean Beggs, a state law was passed that requires police forces to only purchase electric vehicles for their fleets starting in 2018.</p> <p>These Teslas are being tested by the Spokane Police Department as that replacement as its fleet of vehicles is aging. According to Spokane Police Major Mike McNabb, who oversees the fleet department, there are a number of issues with the Teslas.</p> <p>Those include space issues, both when it comes to legroom for officers as well as the fact that the laptop mount covers most of the car's digital dashboard, where most of the car controls are located.</p> <p>McNabb said there are also concerns over the fact that the car's frameless windows don't allow them to attach bars over the windows. According to McNabb, the auto industry hasn't yet made an all-electric car designed to specifically be a police cruiser.</p> <p>"I just think we're getting ahead of ourselves a little bit," McNabb said. "I think if we could let the industry catch up, let the technology catch up to where we can find a suitable vehicle for police work, where we can get our charging infrastructure in place, I think we'll be in a whole lot better position and be a lot more responsible with the taxpayers money with that approach."</p> <p>According to Beggs, the police department can test out other electric vehicles if they want. However, he said it's a matter of being in compliance with state law when it comes to SPD only being able to buy electric cars.</p> <p>The City Council President is confident that the police department will find a solution.</p> <p>"I've tried to engage them on it, so I would say there have not been enough discussions and we're willing to work with them," Beggs said. "We're you know, fleet is the expert, and they're cooperating now. We have a new fleet director, I think he's doing a really good job, so I think they'll get an option figured out soon."</p> <p>Beggs said that the police department could have applied for an exemption to the electric vehicle law, but the deadline has passed.</p> <p>McNabb said there is supposed to be a electric vehicle made specifically for police work done by 2024 or 2025.</p>

	But until then, the police department will have to find a different electric vehicle to replace its aging fleet.
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HEADLINE	02/28 Spokane homeless population count begins
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/community/point-in-time-count-begins/293-7bc60e4c-4411-4ed6-9c24-266f1cf08667
GIST	<p>SPOKANE COUNTY, Wash. — The annual Point-in-Time Count, an annual point-in-time census of the homeless population in Spokane County, began on Friday, February 25. The annual count is used to determine what resources are needed for those experiencing homelessness in Spokane.</p> <p>Nearly 140 volunteers braved the cold temperatures Friday to help with the count. Daniel Ramos, the business system analyst for the City of Spokane, said the data from the count is used to help the city create solutions to address homelessness.</p> <p>Ramos said the count will hopefully help fill in gaps by identifying other issues that might not be on the city's radar.</p> <p>"In the area, we've seen incremental increases," Ramos said. "I believe these numbers to be accurate."</p> <p>The Point-in-Time count has been held since 2005 as part of an initiative to give federally-funded communities a snapshot of where they live. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, last year's count did not take place. The last overall count took place in 2020 and identified roughly 1500 people experiencing homelessness in the area.</p> <p>Cynarra Pleasant, the manager of the outreach program at Cannon Shelter, said the data being collected is valuable.</p> <p>"With the city going out and doing the demographics of the areas, it gives me a better opportunity to go out and extend our outreach to those who really need it," Pleasant said.</p> <p>Pleasant interviewed a man by the name of William who has been experiencing homelessness for three years and seeks shelter in his car. He told Pleasant that being homeless isn't a choice for most and sites housing issues as a major contributing factor.</p> <p>"People don't know the resources to help themselves," William said. "I think they need to have more shelters that are separate."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Seattle, King Co. end vax verification policy
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattle-king-county-to-end-vaccine-verification-policy-march-1
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - King County announced that it will end the county's vaccine verification policy to enter restaurants, bars, theaters and gyms on March 1.</p> <p>King County Executive Dow Constantine and Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell made the announcement earlier this month.</p> <p>Constantine said that new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are decreasing.</p> <p>More than 87% of King County residents ages 12 years and older are fully vaccinated, and vaccination and booster rates continue to increase.</p> <p>"While King County is lifting this requirement, businesses and organizations may still choose to continue requiring vaccines to protect themselves, their employees, their customers," Constantine said. "We support them in that choice."</p>

[King County](#)'s vaccine requirement has been in effect since October 2021.

People 12 years old and up must show proof that they are fully vaccinated or provide a negative [COVID](#) test taken within 72 hours of entry.

This applied to restaurants, bars, gyms, movie theaters and other entertainment venues. The mandate also applies to outdoor events with more than 500 people in attendance.

Constantine and Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell also announced that they will begin, gradually, calling back to the office the thousands of county and city employees who have been working remotely for nearly two years. King County has an estimated 7,000 employees who have been working remotely, and Seattle has about 5,000.

The [mask mandate is still in effect until at least March 12](#)-- the date Gov. Jay Inslee set for the mandate to be lifted. However, King County and Seattle could still have their own mandates past the state lift.

Businesses in [King County can also still ask for vaccine verification](#) at their discretion, but it's not mandated.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Seattle public schools to still require masks
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattle-public-schools-to-continue-with-current-mask-requirements
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Masks will continue to be required until further notice in Seattle Public Schools, the district said Monday after Gov. Jay Inslee announced the statewide masking requirement for schools would be lifted on March 12.</p> <p>In a statement posted online, Seattle Public Schools said: "Future decisions on mask use within the district will be made in partnership with public health, and its implementation will be established after consultation and mutually agreed upon guidelines that are reached through bargaining with our labor partners."</p> <p>District officials said SPS would continue requiring masks until further notice in schools and on buses as required by law:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue until further notice with our current policy requiring mask use by all students, staff, visitors and others while they are indoors and outdoors at all SPS buildings;• Continue to require mask use on school buses, as required by federal law;• Base updates to current masking policy on the specific needs of the district, informed by local public health guidance.• Negotiate with the Seattle Education Association, as required by the current collective bargaining agreement, to arrive at a mutually agreeable position regarding any permanent change to mask use requirements throughout the district. <p>Washington, Oregon and California will drop masking requirements for schools and most public places on March 12, the states jointly announced on Monday.</p> <p>The governors of Washington, Oregon and California announced Monday that schoolchildren will no longer be required to wear masks starting March 12.</p> <p>"With declining case rates and hospitalizations across the West, California, Oregon and Washington are moving together to update their masking guidance," the governors said in a statement. There are more than 7.5 million school-age children across the three states.</p> <p>The governors of the three states announced the measure in a joint statement as part of new indoor mask policies that come as coronavirus case and hospitalization rates decline across the West Coast.</p>

	<p>The new guidance will make face coverings a recommendation rather than a requirement at most indoor places in California starting Tuesday and at schools on March 12, regardless of vaccination status. In Washington and Oregon, all the requirements will lift on March 12.</p> <p>Following that announcement, Everett Public Schools announced that until Monday, March 14, masks will still be required for all students, staff and visitors while in district buildings and on buses. After that, students and staff can wear a mask if they choose to, but it won't be mandated.</p> <p>"Students and staff will have the choice to wear a mask at school, with the expectation that others' choices will be respected. One should not make assumptions regarding someone's beliefs or health status, nor should they comment on them. Our district will not tolerate bullying of any kind for those who choose to continue wearing masks," the district said in a statement.</p> <p>The milestone comes as much of the country relaxes public health orders, including school mask mandates, in an effort to restore normalcy and boost economic recovery.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 DOH: 1,423,990 cases, 11,866 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article258888608.html
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 754 new COVID-19 cases Monday.</p> <p>As of Monday, the state's preliminary death tally was 11,866. The confirmed death tally as of Feb. 10 was 11,649. The state reported 4,682 cases Sunday and 2,452 cases Saturday.</p> <p>The statewide case total from the illness caused by the coronavirus stood at 1,423,990 cases on Monday.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Tacoma area record rainfall, flood watch
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/weather-news/article258873773.html
GIST	<p>Buckle up for a wet week in the Tacoma area. The National Weather Service reports an extended period of rainfall is likely across much of Western Washington as several systems make their way through.</p> <p>The NWS reported that 2.01 inches of rain had fallen in the Tacoma area Monday as of 2 p.m., shattering the previous daily rainfall record for Feb. 28 of 0.66 inches in 2013. The records are for rainfall measured from the weather station at the Tacoma Narrows Airport.</p> <p>More rain is on the way, with between a half inch and three-quarters of an inch of rain predicted for overnight. The forecast predicted a long stretch of rain for the weekend leading into next week. It was forecast to be breezy, too, with south-southwest winds of 20 to 22 mph Monday with gusts as high as 29 mph. The predicted high temperature was 56 degrees, and the low was expected to be 52 degrees overnight.</p> <p>The chance of rain Tuesday and Wednesday was forecast at 80 percent. Forecasters predicted a 40 percent chance of rain Thursday and a slight chance for Friday.</p> <p>A flood warning was in effect through 7 a.m. Tuesday in the Tacoma area, and a flood watch was in effect through 3 p.m. Wednesday.</p> <p>The heaviest rainfall is expected across the coast, Olympics and Cascades, with river flooding highly likely. The NWS reported heavy rainfall could lead to flooding in low-lying areas, near underpasses and areas with poor drainage.</p> <p>The weather made for slick roads Monday morning. The Washington State Department of Transportation urged drivers to use caution and leave more space between vehicles.</p>

In the mountains, snow was continuing to fall as of 3 a.m. Monday at both Stevens Pass and Snoqualmie Pass. Snow levels are continuing to rise, but the NWS said light easterly winds were keeping it cold enough for snow. The passes were closed in both directions Monday morning due to heavy snowfall with no estimated time of reopening.

That snow was expected to transition to rain Monday morning, and an additional three to six inches of water is expected to fall in the Olympics and Cascades by late Tuesday afternoon.

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HEADLINE	02/28 States end school mask mandates
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/California-Oregon-Washington-to-end-school-mask-16958664.php
GIST	<p>SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Schoolchildren in California, Oregon and Washington will no longer be required to wear masks as part of new indoor mask policies the Democratic governors of all three states announced jointly on Monday.</p> <p>“With declining case rates and hospitalizations across the West, California, Oregon and Washington are moving together to update their masking guidance,” the governors said in a statement. There are more than 7.5 million school-age children across the three states, which have had some of the strictest coronavirus safety measures during the pandemic.</p> <p>The new guidance will make face coverings strongly recommended rather than a requirement at most indoor places in California starting Tuesday and at schools on March 12, regardless of vaccination status. In Washington and Oregon, all the requirements will lift on March 12. In all three states, the decision of whether to follow the state guidance will now rest with school districts.</p> <p>The milestone, two years in the making, comes as much of the country relaxes public health orders, including school mask mandates, in an effort to restore normalcy and boost economic recovery. The changes reflect a growing sense that the virus is not going away and Americans need to learn to live with it. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, announced Sunday that the state’s masking requirements in schools would be lifted by March 2. New Jersey, Delaware, Massachusetts and others recently made similar adjustments to ease restrictions for schools.</p> <p>The announcements signal a turning point that is poignant in its timing, coming almost exactly two years after American cities began shutting down to prevent COVID-19’s spread. California was the first state to announce a shutdown with stay-at-home orders in March 2020, followed soon after by other states.</p> <p>“Two years ago today, we identified Oregon’s first case of COVID-19,” Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said in the statement. “On the West Coast our communities and economies are linked. Together, as we continue to recover from the Omicron surge, we will build resiliency and prepare for the next variant and the next pandemic.”</p> <p>Earlier this month, California became the first state to formally shift to an endemic approach to the coronavirus with Gov. Gavin Newsom’s announcement of a plan that emphasizes prevention and quick reaction to outbreaks over mandated masking and business shutdowns.</p> <p>Newsom has come under growing pressure from Republicans and other critics to ease the school mandate, which has increasingly become a polarizing issue among parents, with some questioning why it's still necessary when masks are no longer required in other public places.</p> <p>The powerful California Teachers Association said it expected a mixed reaction to the announcement.</p> <p>“While some students are ready to immediately remove their masks, others remain very afraid,” CTA President E. Toby Boyd said in a statement. The union has more than 300,000 members. “Change is never easy, and today’s announcement is bound to disrupt and destabilize school communities.”</p>

A handful of California school districts have already dropped mask mandates for students in recent weeks in open defiance of the state mandate. Meanwhile, a survey published last week by the UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies found that more than 60% of California parents still support wearing masks in schools.

In Connecticut, Monday marked the first day of classes since the state ended its school mask mandate. Kindergarten teacher Rochelle Brown said 15 of her 17 students came to school wearing masks, and she is still wearing a mask in class herself.

"This is normalcy for them," said Brown, a teacher at Poquonock Elementary School in Windsor, Connecticut, where a lot of her students have never known school without a mask. "I didn't really hear a lot of conversation with the kids saying, 'Oh, there's that child, they're not wearing their mask.' They just did what they normally do every day."

The West Coast announcements come after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased the federal mask guidance Friday, essentially saying the majority of Americans don't need to wear masks in many indoor public places, including schools. Federal mask mandates still apply in high-risk indoor settings such as public transportation, in airports and in taxis.

The new CDC guidelines are based on measures focused more on what's happening at hospitals than on test results. The CDC said that more than 70% of Americans live in places where the coronavirus poses a low or medium threat to hospitals and therefore can stop wearing masks in most indoor places.

The CDC had endorsed universal masking in schools regardless of virus levels in the community since July, but it is now recommending masks only in counties at high risk.

Based on that criteria, 16 of Oregon's 36 counties fall under the "high" level of transmission. Dr. Dean Sidelinger, Oregon's state epidemiologist, said he hopes community leaders will use the CDC framework in "guiding their decisions" about masking.

California and Washington also have several counties still listed as high risk, but projections show that case numbers and hospitalizations will continue to drop over the coming weeks, officials said.

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HEADLINE	02/28 States add to financial pressure on Russia
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/US-states-adding-to-financial-squeeze-on-Russian-16958671.php
GIST	<p>Seeking to tighten the financial squeeze on Russia over its war against Ukraine, governors and lawmakers in numerous U.S. states were taking actions Monday to pull state investments from Russian companies while encouraging private entities to do the same.</p> <p>The effect of sanctions by U.S. states often pales in comparison to national ones, but state officials said they wanted to show solidarity with Ukraine and do what they could to build upon the penalties imposed on Russia by the U.S. government and other Western nations.</p> <p>Georgia House Speaker David Ralston, a Republican, got a bipartisan standing ovation Monday when he told representatives he would seek to have the state's retirement funds quickly divested from any Russian assets.</p> <p>"I don't know about y'all, but I don't want one penny of Georgians' money going to subsidize Vladimir Putin," Ralston said. "While our role in international affairs is limited, we make clear we stand with those who want to live in peace."</p> <p>Some actions have been largely symbolic. The capitols in Arizona, Pennsylvania and Tennessee and the governor's mansion in South Carolina were lit with the blue and yellow colors of Ukraine's flag. Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat, and Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican, issued a joint</p>

statement condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine as co-chairs of the presidentially appointed Council of Governors. Oklahoma's Republican-controlled Senate passed a resolution affirming the historical ties between the state and the people of Ukraine and supporting their fight against what it described as "an illegal and violent" Russian invasion.

Other state actions have potential teeth.

On Monday, the Indiana House passed legislation that would block Russian-controlled businesses and nonprofits from acquiring property in Indiana for one year. It now goes to the Senate.

"Indiana will not be a safe haven for ill-gotten Russian funds, nor for its oligarchs trying to find financial shelter in the wake of Putin's unconscionable invasion of Ukraine," Democratic state Rep. Ryan Dvorak said while proposing the amendment last week.

Pennsylvania lawmakers said Monday they will file legislation requiring state pension funds to pull investments connected to the Russian government and its critical supporters. The state Treasury Department also has begun divesting its minimal holdings in Russian-based companies.

In a memo to fellow senators, Democratic state Sen. Sharif Street said Pennsylvania "must wield our economic power to ensure that Russia faces grave consequences for their flagrant violations of international law and human cooperation."

Pennsylvania House Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff, a Republican seeking co-sponsors for the legislation, said state lawmakers "have a moral obligation to ensure that our public fund investments are not inadvertently supporting those who are engaging in an unprovoked invasion of their democratically elected neighbors."

Arkansas lawmakers have filed proposals authorizing banks in the state to freeze the assets of Russian oligarchs and to require a boycott of Russian-made goods. Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson declared Tuesday through Thursday "special days of prayer for Ukraine."

A bipartisan group of California lawmakers said Monday they also will introduce legislation to divest public money from Russian state entities.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul signed an executive order Sunday forbidding her state from doing business with Russia. She ordered state agencies to divest money and assets from companies or institutions aiding Russia in its war against Ukraine. The Democratic governor also said New York would welcome Ukrainian refugees, noting that New York already is home to the largest Ukrainian population in the U.S.

On Monday, North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, ordered state offices under his control to terminate government contracts that benefit Russian businesses.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, a Democrat, also has banned state agencies from doing business with Russian state-owned firms and their subcontractors. Colorado's \$61 billion state pension fund is pulling \$8 million from a Russian state-owned bank identified in federal sanctions.

Governors or other state officials in Connecticut, Indiana, New Jersey, Oregon, Virginia and Washington also have ordered a review of whether any state money is going to Russian companies or investments supporting the Russian government. A North Dakota investment board was due to meet later this week to discuss its investments in Russia.

"If our state can put one brick in the wall around Putin, it will be a good thing, and we intend to do all that we can in this regard," said Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat.

Two prominent Republican governors, Florida's Ron DeSantis and South Dakota's Kristi Noem, who are widely seen as angling for a White House bid, mostly took aim at President Joe Biden rather than issuing

executive orders targeting Russia. They criticized his energy policies and said that had made it difficult to slap sanctions on Russia's exports of oil and gas.

Other governors are seeking to sever good-will relationships between their home states and those in Russia.

Republican Gov. Larry Hogan announced Monday that he's dissolving Maryland's decades-old sister-state relationship with Russia's Leningrad region after the invasion of Ukraine. Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, asked the cities of Norfolk and Roanoke to end their sister city partnerships with Russian cities. Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, called for an end to its sister state relationship with Stavropol Krai, Russia, and a strengthening of its sister state relationship with Cherkasy Oblast, Ukraine.

Several states have expressed a willingness to provide housing to Ukrainian refugees. The Washington state House and Senate each have added amendments to their budget proposals setting aside \$19 million to provide services and temporary housing to refugees who come from Ukraine.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican, posted on Twitter over the weekend that he has asked restaurants and retailers "to voluntarily remove all Russian products from their shelves."

Officials in Alabama, Iowa, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia — all states that control the sale of alcohol — have directed Russian-sourced alcohol to be removed from store shelves.

"Utah stands in solidarity with Ukraine and will not support Russian enterprises, no matter how small the exchange," Republican Utah Gov. Spencer Cox said.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Mask mandate for schools to end March 12th
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/gov-inslee-will-lift-washingtons-covid-19-mask-requirements-on-march-12-after-change-to-federal-guidelines/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee has pushed up the timeline for lifting Washington's COVID-19 mask requirements for schools and businesses to Saturday, March 12, after federal officials last week loosened public health guidelines on face coverings.</p> <p>Made in conjunction with the governors of Oregon and California, Monday's announcement comes as the number of cases and hospitalizations due to the new coronavirus in Washington continues to decline.</p> <p>Inslee earlier this month had announced the mask orders — which cover grocery stores, child care facilities, gyms, bars and other indoor establishments — would lift March 21. But federal health regulators on Friday revised federal health guidelines and said masks were no longer necessary for many people.</p> <p>As the virus's omicron variant wanes, conversations are being sparked everywhere — from classrooms and homes to retail shops and executive suites — about when and how to return to a pre-pandemic modes of life.</p> <p>As with much of the two years of public health regulations to stem the pandemic, the governor's decision brought questions and critiques across the board. Republicans castigated the governor for moving too slowly.</p> <p>"We've learned that it's no longer necessary to keep our communities safe," Senate Minority Leader John Braun, R-Centralia, said in a news conference in reference to masking.</p> <p>And then there was the Seattle Education Association, which quickly made clear it intends to raise concerns about any lift on masking through union negotiations.</p>

Removing the mask mandate will fail students and educators who are or live with someone who is immunocompromised, children under 5 who can't receive the vaccine, and those who are pregnant, said Jennifer Matter, president of the association.

"It is important that with masking changes the voices of those most vulnerable to COVID be heard, educators and students alike," Matter said. "Their needs are historically dismissed in hasty moves to normalcy."

And then there was Nathan Plutko, who has spent the past two years at Seattle's DeLaurenti Food and Wine adjusting his business to outdoor dining amid COVID and working to keep his own staff and customers safe.

A co-owner of a DeLaurenti for 19 years, Plutko has a 2-year-old who's too young to be vaccinated, he said, and will probably continue to wear a mask himself. But he's not sure what to do with employees and the public when the mandate lifts. Before the pandemic, this was a hybrid grocery/wine retailer and dine-in stop, but now they only do outdoor dining.

"The market has been great and we're ready for things to get back to normal, because there's nothing like being here [Pike Place] in the spring and summer," Plutko said. "But the top priority is making sure our employees feel safe and are safe, so I just don't know when we're going to actually go back to that point."

"We are like cautiously optimistic that we're moving in the right direction and I know Inslee is one of the more careful governors in the country, so he's getting it from both sides," Plutko added. "He's getting thanks and he's also getting 'what's taking you so long' from some people."

With just under two weeks until the mandates lift for schools, parents like Beth Anderson also digested the decision Monday. Her two daughters, Catelyn, 12, and Julia, 11, attend Eckstein Middle School in northeast Seattle.

Catelyn received the adult vaccine, but Julia's been vaccinated with the pediatric doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID vaccine and due to her age, she is ineligible for a booster. Monday's news of the lift on masking in Washington coincided with the release of a report finding that the Pfizer shot is significantly less effective in preventing infection in kids ages 5-11 than with older children.

Anderson said both her daughters are happy to be back in school in person and have done their due diligence to stay masked. The mother underscores to them the importance of staying masked to protect young children, older and immunocompromised people, as well as for their own health and safety.

"The lifting of the mask mandates makes me a little nervous," said Anderson, adding later: "I feel like she's still at risk and we don't know what the long-term effects of COVID are."

In recent weeks, the COVID exposure notifications have become fewer she said, but Anderson hopes she can convince her kids, especially Julia — who doesn't turn 12 until August — to stay masked through the rest of the school year as a precaution.

"It might be hard if other kids aren't wearing masks. There's a peer pressure component and I understand it will be hard for her," the mother said.

The state health department is expected to issue new guidance for K-12 schools next week.

Meanwhile, Inslee on Monday said he'll reveal the "the next chapter" in the coming days for how the state will respond to COVID.

"We believe that this will be based ... on a provision of empowering individuals and families to protect themselves, rather than having a mandate," he said in Monday's news conference. That plan is intended to

make sure the state has among other things vaccines and personal protective equipment available, in case another variant emerges.

While the governor's statewide mandates are the most comprehensive, other mask requirements are also set to fall.

King County will end its local mask order at the same time as the state's mandate expires, County Executive Dow Constantine announced Monday. Snohomish County is likewise lifting its mask mandate, which applies to public indoor spaces, starting March 12.

And in the world of private enterprise, Amazon told employees Sunday it would no longer require unvaccinated warehouse workers to mask up, according to a memo viewed by CNN and other media outlets.

The company's vaccinated warehouse workers have been allowed to work without masks in places where state or local rules permit doing so. Amazon initially lifted its mask mandate for vaccinated workers in May but reimposed it during COVID spikes associated with the delta and omicron variants.

Monday's announcement by Inslee comes after officials with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday released updated guidance on the new coronavirus.

Inslee's office on Friday said there were no plans to change Washington's masking orders, but that officials would review the CDC guidance, and "there will be a broader discussion" with the governor's office and the state health officials.

The new federal guidelines released Friday move away from looking at COVID case counts to a broader view of risk from the virus to a community. The previous guidelines recommended masks for those in communities with a substantial or high transmission of the virus — which was roughly 95% of U.S. counties.

The new system greatly changes the look of the CDC's risk map and puts more than 70% of the U.S. population in counties where COVID-19 is posing a low or medium threat to hospital capacity. Those are the people who can stop wearing masks, per the agency.

Of Washington's 39 counties, nine are considered high risk; 16 are medium risk; and 14 are low risk, including King County, the state's most populous.

That's one of umpteen government charts designed over the past two years to help guide citizens through pandemic's many evolutions.

But if Anderson, the parent, could ask health officials anything, she would want to know what they are recommending their own kids do.

"There's just so many changes these kids have had," she said. "What I really want for them is stability."

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HEADLINE	02/28 Seattle area record rainfall, flood watch
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/continuing-rain-in-puget-sound-region-brings-flood-watch-closed-passes-and-avalanche-warnings/
GIST	<p>After an uncharacteristically dry February, enough rain fell Monday that in just one day, Seattle made up for an entire month of missed moisture.</p> <p>National Weather Service meteorologist Dustin Guy predicted rain Monday would break the record for the date — and he was right.</p>

By noon, Seattle received 1.63 inches of rain, breaking the previous record for Feb. 28 of 1.46 inches set in 1972, and by 5 p.m., 2.39 inches had fallen.

That put the month's rain total at 4.74 inches, which is more than the average 3.76 inches Seattle gets in February, said NWS meteorologist Justin Pullin.

A [flood warning issued Monday morning](#) by the NWS said rain and supersaturated soil could cause excessive runoff and increase landslides and debris flows, as well as flooding some small streams and urban areas.

That's in addition to river flooding addressed in a flood watch issued earlier in the day.

[The flood watch, in effect through Wednesday afternoon](#), pertains to rivers in King, Lewis, Pierce, Snohomish, Thurston, Grays Harbor, Mason, Skagit and Whatcom counties. According to the weather service, rivers flowing off the Cascades could begin flooding Monday, while rivers flowing off the Olympics could start Monday night.

One exception is the Skokomish River in Mason County, which was already at flood levels by Monday morning.

Officials in Issaquah advised residents to prepare for localized flooding due to the rising Issaquah Creek. [Forecasts](#) predicted the creek will reach its high point around 10 p.m. Monday.

[The flood warning for urban areas and small streams is expected to expire Tuesday morning.](#)

In the mountains, Snoqualmie Pass closed in both directions for most of Monday because of heavy snowfall and avalanche danger, the Washington Department of Transportation [said on Twitter](#). The pass fully reopened in both directions at 5 p.m. WSDOT is advising traction tires on the pass and for drivers to be alert of areas of standing water.

Stevens Pass also reopened in both directions after it was closed from Milepost 58 near Scenic to MP 64 near the Summit for avalanche control.

The Northwest Avalanche Center [issued warnings for almost all of its forecasting zones](#). "Triggering a slide is likely and will be big enough to bury or kill you. Avoid travel in or below avalanche terrain," [the center said](#).

Though a stubborn easterly wind kept temperatures in the Cascade Mountains colder Monday than most of the Puget Sound region — where temperatures rose to the mid-50s — that mountain snow should eventually turn to rain, Guy said.

The heavy rain will taper off around Tuesday afternoon, which will follow with another wave of unsettled weather. That means more of our more typical Seattle winter weather and then a potentially drier weekend, Pullin said.

"We're fortunately going to get a reprieve from the persistent to heavy rain starting (Tuesday)," he said. "But the rain is not necessarily going to go away."

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HEADLINE	02/28 Gov. directs agencies: cut ties Russia firms
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/gov-inslee-directs-wa-agencies-to-cut-ties-with-russian-companies-over-invasion-of-ukraine/
GIST	OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee on Monday announced an effort to sever ties with Russian entities doing business with Washington state in protest of the invasion of Ukraine.

In a news conference that focused on the [impending lift of the state's COVID-19 mask requirements](#), the governor called the invasion of Ukraine an “outrageous foreign invasion.”

“We in some sense are all Ukrainians today,” Inslee said. “And we stand with those people in Russia who are protesting this vicious, malicious, totally unjustified act of violence.”

In response, the governor said he wants to identify any connections at Washington’s state agencies — business or otherwise — with Russian state institutions or significant companies. Once identified, he said the state intends to cancel those contracts.

The governor also urged private companies in Washington state to consider cutting ties with Russia. Any inconvenience from cutting those ties, Inslee said, should be weighed against the defense of a democratic nation and the possibility of heading off a wider conflict.

“I would say it’s going to be a lot worse for business if we end up in some type of armed conflict with Vladimir Putin,” Inslee said. “Because he doesn’t get the message that we are not going to let him go into Poland and Bulgaria and Hungary and Latvia and Estonia. He needs to get that message.”

It remains to be seen what impact the governor’s directive may have. In an email, Inslee spokesperson Mike Faulk wrote that, “Our staff have been reaching out to agencies for fact finding.”

Officials are reviewing annual reports submitted by state agencies that detail all their contracts, according to Linda Kent, spokesperson for the state Department of Enterprise Services.

The agency “is currently working to analyze the contracts that were reported during the last contract reporting cycle (active contracts from July 2020 through June 2021), which includes DES agency contracts,” Kent wrote in an email. “DES is doing an analysis on statewide master contracts as well.”

Inslee’s remarks Monday meanwhile capped a swift and bipartisan response in Olympia to the [attack against Ukraine](#). Over the weekend, Washington Senate lawmakers approved a budget amendment to earmark nearly \$20 million in refugee aid for any Ukrainians who might come to Washington.

In a regularly scheduled news conference Monday morning, Senate Minority Leader John Braun, R-Centralia, said that move fits with Washington’s [long bipartisan history of welcoming refugees to the state](#).

“We want to make sure we’re prepared to receive those refugees should that occur,” Braun said.

Inslee’s announcement Monday came as Democratic and Republican officials in state capitals across the nation move to cut ties with the Putin regime.

On Sunday, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul signed an executive order forbidding her state from doing business with Russia. She ordered state agencies to divest money and assets from companies or institutions aiding Russia in its war against Ukraine.

Pennsylvania lawmakers said Monday they will file legislation requiring state pension funds to pull investments connected to the Russian government and its critical supporters. The state Treasury Department also has begun divesting its minimal holdings in Russian-based companies.

Arkansas lawmakers have filed proposals authorizing banks in the state to freeze the assets of Russian oligarchs and to require a boycott of Russian-made goods. A bipartisan group of California lawmakers said Monday they also will introduce legislation to divest public money from Russian state entities.

Republican Gov. Larry Hogan announced Monday that he’s dissolving Maryland’s decades-old sister-state relationship with Russia’s Leningrad region after the invasion of Ukraine. Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, asked the cities of Norfolk and Roanoke to end their sister-city partnerships with Russian cities.

	Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, called for an end to its sister-state relationship with Stavropol Krai, Russia, and a strengthening of its sister-state relationship with Cherkasy Oblast, Ukraine.
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HEADLINE	03/01 Oil jumps to 7yr-high; gas prices to follow
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/01/us-oil-jumps-to-7-year-high-above-101-a-barrel-as-russian-assault-prompts-supply-shortage-fears.html
GIST	<p>Oil prices surged Tuesday, with U.S. crude hitting its highest level since July 2014 as Russia bears down on Ukraine's capital.</p> <p>Prices first topped the \$100 mark last Thursday when Russia invaded Ukraine, prompting fears of supply disruptions from key exporter Russia, in what is already a very tight market.</p> <p>West Texas Intermediate crude futures, the U.S. oil benchmark, jumped 5.7% to trade at \$101.17 per barrel.</p> <p>International benchmark Brent crude advanced 6.3% to trade at \$104.16 per barrel. The contract rose to \$105.79 last week, the highest since 2014.</p> <p>On Monday Canada said it was banning Russian oil imports, but so far it's the only nation to target Russia's energy complex directly. The financial sanctions imposed by the U.S. and Western allies could carve out room for energy payments to continue.</p> <p>But the ripple effects are already showing. "Key European financiers to commodity trade houses have already begun curbing financing for commodities trades, and Chinese banks are also pulling back," JPMorgan said Tuesday in a note to clients. "Current oil price differentials are reflecting a clear unwillingness to take Russian crude," the firm added.</p> <p>Ahead of Russia invading Ukraine the global oil market was already tight. Demand has bounced back, while supply has remained constrained. OPEC and its oil-producing allies, which includes Russia, will meet this week to discuss output for April.</p> <p>The International Energy Agency meantime is holding an "extraordinary" meeting Tuesday to discuss "the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on oil supply and how IEA members can play a role in stabilising energy markets," IEA's executive director Fatih Birol said Monday in a tweet.</p> <p>Morgan Stanley raised its near-term oil price forecasts on Tuesday, saying the events in Ukraine have introduced a "risk premium in oil prices that is likely to remain in coming months."</p> <p>"Against a backdrop of market tightness, even small disruptions can have large price impacts," the firm added.</p> <p>Morgan Stanley now sees Brent averaging \$110 in the second quarter, up from a prior forecast of \$100. Under the firm's bull case, prices will jump to \$125 per barrel.</p> <p>Goldman Sachs said Sunday that demand destruction is the only "significant remaining balancing mechanism."</p> <p>Americans are feeling the impacts of higher oil prices at the pump. The national average for a gallon of gas stood at \$3.619 on Tuesday, according to data from AAA, up 24 cents from a month ago.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/01 US officials fear: worst yet to come for Kyiv
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/politics/us-kyiv-fears/index.html

(CNN) Ukrainian forces have so far managed to stave off Russian ground forces massed less than 20 miles north of the embattled capital Kyiv -- but though they've [defied US intelligence predictions](#) that the city would likely fall within one to four days of a full-scale Russian assault, US officials warn that Russian President Vladimir Putin could imminently increase the intensity of the attack.

Stiffer than expected Ukrainian resistance and Russia's own logistical missteps have bogged down Russia's advance, US and western officials say, sparking a fragile optimism. The US has also continued sharing downgraded intelligence with the Ukrainians, including about Russian military moves, in an attempt to help Ukraine on the battlefield, two of the sources told CNN.

But intelligence and defense officials closely tracking the Russian campaign say that Putin still holds a number of moves in reserve that could devastate the Ukrainian resistance.

"From a purely military/tactical standpoint, Russia has the manpower and firepower to take Kyiv. No question," said an American source familiar with the intelligence. "And no matter how much resistance the Ukrainians put up."

Roughly a quarter of Russia's amassed troops have yet to enter Ukraine, a senior defense official told reporters on Monday -- a potential "second wave," according to two sources familiar with the intelligence - - and defense officials say Putin could yet order a far less restrained bombing campaign, including airstrikes, long-range missiles and artillery.

"They have been slowed and they have been frustrated by their lack of progress on Kyiv, and one of the things that could result is a reevaluation of their tactics and the potential for them to be more aggressive and more overt in both the size and the scale of their targeting of Kyiv," a senior defense official told reporters on Monday.

Administration officials warned lawmakers in classified briefings Monday that a "second wave" of Russian troops will likely consolidate the country's positions within Ukraine and by sheer numbers be able to overcome the Ukrainian resistance, according to two people familiar with the briefings.

"That part was disheartening," one lawmaker told CNN.

The officials also said Russia was likely going to lay siege to Kyiv and predicted ugly scenes of urban warfare, one of the people familiar with the matter said.

And at the end of the day, officials tracking the campaign say, the ugly truth remains that Ukraine is massively outgunned and outmanned -- even as Russia has made what military strategists say are a number of obvious blunders.

Already, Russia appears to be ramping up its campaign in the east and the south. In the northeastern city of Kharkiv, Russian forces have launched rocket attacks on at least one residential neighborhood that have killed civilians, according to Ukrainian officials and multiple social media videos geolocated by CNN. Meanwhile, in the small southern city of Mykolaiv, located on an inlet that would be a useful access point for Russians to bring in troops and supplies, the fighting has been among the most intense in Ukraine in recent days.

Holding back?

Five days into its multipronged assault on Ukraine, Russia has suffered repeated logistical failures that defense officials and independent military analysts say are largely of its own making. Russian mechanized forces that have been the tip of the spear have often outpaced their own sustainment units carrying fuel and other supplies, leaving the support units open to ambush and stranding forward-advancing forces without fuel in the tank.

"Whether they outran [sustainment capabilities] or whether they just didn't plan properly for it, or whether they just simply didn't execute their plan for it, I don't know," said the senior defense official. But, "on day

4, they're running out of gas and they've having logistics problems. Our assessment was that they did not believe they would be having those kinds of problems that early on."

Meanwhile, western officials have cheered on a better-than-anticipated showing by Ukrainian forces, in particular how effective they have been using western-provided Stinger shoulder-fired missiles and anti-aircraft artillery to take down an unknown number of Russian helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.

"The Russians don't have complete control of the airspace of the entire country," said the senior western intelligence official. "In the areas in which the Russian military operations are the most intense on the ground, those are the areas where the Russians have the most control over the airspace in terms of air to air."

But Western officials still aren't entirely sure why Russia has held back some forces outside of Ukraine's borders, or why Russia has not yet carried out the kind of electronic warfare against Ukraine the west had been anticipating -- like massive hacking campaigns and attacks on critical infrastructure.

One official said the US believes Russia has been holding back on severing communications on the ground -- a tactic the west had expected early but has yet to happen -- because the Russian military forces need that infrastructure to communicate amongst themselves.

As for the troops left on the border, it's possible that Russia has planned the attack in waves in an effort to exhaust the Ukrainians with the first wave and then demolish them with a second wave of fresh troops, according to two sources familiar with the intelligence. It's also possible, according to one of those sources, that Russia has simply moved cautiously after facing a tougher fight than expected.

At this point, officials said, it's impossible to put a timeline on how long Ukrainian forces will be able to hold the Russians at the gates of Kyiv.

"I can't put a number [on how long Kyiv lasts]," the senior western intelligence official said. "I can't tell you it's going to be hours or days."

"While the Ukrainians are putting on a stiff defense, and a much better one than I think the Russians anticipated, there will be a time where they will run out of ammunition. There will come a time where they run out of fuel and they can't move," this person said. "We are mindful of that and they are mindful of that."

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HEADLINE	03/01 Intel priority: Putin's state of mind
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/01/politics/us-intelligence-putin-state-of-mind/index.html
GIST	<p>Washington (CNN)The US intelligence community has made evaluating Russian President Vladimir Putin's state of mind a top priority in recent days as it seeks to establish how that is affecting his handling of the rapidly escalating Ukraine crisis, according to two sources familiar with the effort.</p> <p>The efforts come as longtime Putin-watchers have publicly speculated that his behavior has become increasingly erratic and irrational. Since he launched Russia's invasion of Ukraine last Wednesday, senior US officials have asked intelligence agencies to gather any new information they can on how the Russian leader is faring and how his mindset has been impacted by the unexpectedly unified and tough response from European neighbors and allies around the world.</p> <p>The US intelligence community has spent decades decoding the former KGB officer, who has effectively ruled Russia since 1999. But while the United States has tremendous institutional knowledge of the man, it has a notoriously poor view into his day-to-day decision-making. The Kremlin remains what intelligence officials call a "hard target" -- incredibly difficult to penetrate through traditional espionage.</p>

There has not been any new comprehensive assessment that indicates a particular change to Putin's overall health, said one US official. And officials have been on guard for the possibility that Putin's strategy may well be to project instability, in an attempt to push the US and allies to give him what he wants for fear that he could do worse.

But the sudden burst of interest reflects a sense among some intelligence officials that Putin's decision-making in Ukraine has been out of character -- perhaps due to what some previous intelligence reports suggest has been protracted isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Everything US has [is] in [the] realm of conjecture because Putin's decisions and statements don't seem to be making sense," said one source familiar with recent intelligence reporting on the topic. "For years, decades Putin has acted according to a pretty specific template."

In a classified briefing for lawmakers on Monday evening, Avril Haines, the director of national intelligence, said the US intelligence community does not have good insight into Putin's state of mind, according to a lawmaker who was present.

Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa, who attended the Senate briefing, confirmed that Putin's state of mind had come up, but he declined to elaborate on what had been shared.

He did say, however, that regardless of the briefing, he personally is worried about Putin's mindset.

Scores of raw intelligence reports

The intelligence community has produced scores of raw intelligence reports from sources as information pours in about the war. One such report that has circulated to more than a dozen agencies cites a source who has relayed that Putin's behavior has become "highly concerning and unpredictable" over just the last two days, according to a copy obtained by CNN.

But in an indication of how difficult this information is to obtain directly, the description came secondhand to the FBI from a source who had talked to another, unknown source "with excellent access." The report notes that this person had in the past provided information that intelligence agencies were able to independently corroborate.

The source behind the report told the FBI that Putin "expressed extreme anger" over Western sanctions put in place in response to his attack on Ukraine and "felt that the sanctions had escalated the situation faster than he expected and beyond what he considered to be appropriate." Precisely which sanctions so infuriated Putin is unknown; that portion of the report is redacted.

The report also notes that the circulation of accurate information about the war has been extremely limited within Russia, even at the highest levels of society.

For example, many people and well-connected individuals with the means to leave Russia before airports and borders were closed have remained in the country, according to the report -- suggesting that they had not known about the closures in advance.

The report, which originated from the FBI, comes with some caveats: It acknowledges that the source who provided the information to the FBI "may have provided the information to influence and inform" US decision-making -- in other words, that it might be an information operation designed to manipulate the United States.

And officials caution that raw intelligence should not be taken as fact. It has not been evaluated for reliability or analyzed for its implications.

But the report has nevertheless caused other agencies inside the Biden administration to ask the FBI to follow up with its source for additional information.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the CIA and the FBI declined to comment.

A long history

Speculation about Putin's mental health began after he gave a speech on Thursday laying out a warped, revisionist history that purported to justify his intervention in Ukraine. Sen. Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican, [tweeted on Friday](#) that Putin "has always been a killer, but his problem now is different & significant" -- and suggested he was basing his assessment on intelligence briefings given to him as the vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"I wish I could share more, but for now I can say it's pretty obvious to many that something is off with #Putin," Rubio wrote. "It would be a mistake to assume this Putin would react the same way he would have 5 years ago."

For some, the boldness of Putin's decision to invade -- as well as his implied threat to use nuclear weapons -- is a break with the carefully calculated and far more limited military campaigns he has launched in the past. Video footage of the Russian President seated dozens of feet away from his senior military advisers during meetings and gleefully dressing down one of his spy chiefs on television have only underscored the image of an isolated leader, acting on his own counsel alone.

By Sunday, the floodgates had opened. Former Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul tweeted that Putin had "changed," and sounded "completely disconnected from reality" and "unhinged." Former Director of National Intelligence Jim Clapper, who is a national security analyst at CNN, also called Putin "unhinged" and warned, "I worry about his acuity and balance."

Other longtime Putin watchers argue that the Russian President's recent actions are relatively consistent with the man US intelligence has fixated on for decades, noting that he has long demonstrated a willingness to risk military defeat in operations that the United States thought offered no chance of success -- including ordering a second invasion of Chechnya in 1999, just three years after the Russian military had already been defeated there once.

"This is not different than anything he's said before, he's just saying it all at once in a very stark way. And he's willing to do unspeakable things -- but he's always been willing to do unspeakable things," said Beth Sanner, a former briefer to then-President Donald Trump and a CNN national security analyst.

Putin isn't "insane or unhinged," Sanner said. Rather, she said, he is "highly emotional right now because of what he was about to embark upon ... and he has been very, very isolated, which adds to that emotional sense. But I don't think he's crazy."

One US official echoed that assessment to CNN, arguing that Putin is acting in a way that he has long signaled he was capable of. Rather than a change in his mental acuity, this person said, officials believe he's simply become enraged -- making it impossible for his senior advisers to give him frank assessments.

Even his command to put Russia's nuclear deterrent forces on high alert Sunday isn't unprecedented. In 2014, when Putin annexed Crimea, he also raised the possibility he might put his nuclear forces on high alert, which then as now raised the specter of nuclear weapons being introduced into the conflict.

Russia's nuclear doctrine, published in 2020, also includes a first-use nuclear policy. The Kremlin "reserves the right to use nuclear weapons," including "for the prevention of an escalation of military actions and their termination on conditions that are acceptable for the Russian Federation and/or its allies."

Still, a source familiar with recent intelligence reporting on the topic said, it is "difficult to achieve conclusion of any confidence regarding Putin's state of mind. Would need SIGINT of phone call/video of leader losing it on his cabinet or something like that."

SIGINT, or "signals intelligence," is an intelligence community term that refers to intercepted communications.

	<p>"Real-time communication between Russian cabinet leaders," this person said, is a "very hard target."</p> <p>Ultimately, this official and others say, understanding Putin's recent behavior is a matter of analysis -- not intelligence. It's possible, officials say, that they may never have an answer.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/01 Consumers will soon face rising costs
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/01/economy/russia-sanctions-inflation/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business)As the United States and Europe ramp up their sanctions on Russia, Western consumers will soon face rising costs.</p> <p>That's true even for American consumers, even though relatively few Russian exports reach US shores.</p> <p>The higher prices are modest compared to the destruction of life and property in Ukraine. But the price pressures come at a bad time when America's inflation rate is already at a nearly 40-year high. And the pressures on household budgets could undermine broad support for sanctions among the broader population in the West.</p> <p>Oil</p> <p>For example, Russian-produced oil and gas accounts for less than 4% of fuel consumed by Americans. But the average price of regular gasoline is up 8 cents a gallon, to \$3.61, since the day before Russia invaded Ukraine, and wholesale prices are up even more. That means within a couple of weeks, gas is expected to reach an average of \$4 a gallon nationwide in the United States for the first time since 2008. It could soon top the record \$4.11 per gallon average set that year.</p> <p>"It's a world market," said Tom Kloza, global head of energy analysis for the Oil Price Information Service, which tracks gas data for AAA. "We have to compete more for the non-tainted Russian oil that's available."</p> <p>Despite sanctions, it is still legal to buy Russian oil and natural gas. But much of it is going unsold. Many traders are unwilling to buy it because of the difficulty completing transactions with sanctioned Russian banks.</p> <p>Oil prices rose another 3% Monday in response to the new rules limiting Russia's use of SWIFT, the essential plumbing for global finance that allows banks to send the secure communications required to move funds.</p> <p>"Removing some Russian banks from SWIFT could result in a disruption of oil supplies as buyers and sellers try to figure out how to navigate the new rules," Andrew Lipow, an industry consultant, said in a note to clients Sunday. "Bottom line: No funding, no oil."</p> <p>Another concern for traders: how to safely get tankers into Russian ports to pick up oil.</p> <p>"No tankers means no oil," Kloza said.</p> <p>Delivery</p> <p>The price of a gallon of diesel hit \$4 a gallon for the first time in nearly eight years over the weekend. Although few Americans drive diesel-powered cars, most large trucks use it. And just about all goods sold in the United States are moved by truck at some point.</p> <p>The trucking industry itself has been facing challenges for years, mostly due to a shortage of drivers. The higher fuel costs will be passed on by trucking companies in the form of fuel surcharges. So all businesses will have to pay higher transportation costs. With already high inflation, they are likely to pass along those costs to consumers.</p>

"Household and business inflation expectations have reached very high levels, and they could rise further if the Russian invasion of Ukraine causes energy prices to spike or disrupts supply chains," wrote Goldman Sachs in a note Monday warning of [higher and more persistent inflation](#) than previously forecast.

Commodities

Although Russia's economy is centered around its energy exports, they are not the only Russian products the West uses. The US bought about \$25 billion in goods from Russia last year, not including \$4.8 billion in crude oil. That may sound like a lot, but the non-oil purchases amount to only slightly more than half of what US customers bought from tiny Thailand last year.

Commodities such as wheat and lumber are major Russian exports, and those prices have increased on global commodity markets as well. Russia also is a major exporter of such crucial metals as aluminum, palladium, nickel and titanium. Palladium is used in automobiles, mobile phones and even dental fillings. Nickel is used to make steel and electric car batteries. Titanium is crucial to aerospace products, including commercial jets.

Uncertainty about the supply of those products, and the rise in prices on commodity markets, could create "further disruption to global supply chains already suffering from the pandemic and shortages of semiconductors," said a note Monday from Carsten Brzeski, the global head of macroeconomics for ING Research. That could also feed higher prices as the shortage of computer chips is a major factor in new and used car prices hitting record levels.

"Globally, a surge in commodity prices will aggravate already existing inflationary pressures," Brzeski said.

The Fed

Still, the war could also cause the US Federal Reserve and other central banks to actually pull back on their efforts to rein in inflation through higher interest rates. The uncertainty about the overall economic impact could make the regulators even more cautious.

Federal Reserve Governor Christopher Waller said in a [speech](#) last Thursday that based on recent economic data, "a strong case can be made" for a half percentage point hike in March, which would be the first time since 2000 the [Fed raised rates by that much](#) at one meeting. But he then cautioned, "Of course, it is possible that the state of the world will be different in the wake of the Ukraine attack, and that may mean that a more modest tightening is appropriate." Waller added that the right decision is now more uncertain.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Recall: more Abbott baby formula
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/baby-formula-recall-similac-abbott/
GIST	<p>Abbott has issued a recall for another lot of baby formula after an additional child who is believed to have consumed the formula fell ill and later died, the FDA said Monday. The recall affects one lot of Similac PM 60/40 that was made at Abbott Nutrition's Sturgis, Michigan, facility.</p> <p>Parents should check any purchased formula for the lot code # 27032K80 (can) or # 27032K800 (case) and throw it away if it matches, the FDA said. Consumers can also use this link to check if they should throw away their formula.</p> <p>The FDA said this lot is a special formula "for certain infants who would benefit from lowered mineral intake." It was not included in the previous recall.</p> <p>"At this time, Similac PM 60/40 with lot code 27032K80 (can) / 27032K800 (case) are the only type and lots of this specialty formula being recalled," the FDA said.</p>

	<p>The recall comes after the CDC announced that another infant who had been exposed to the formula was infected with Cronobacter sakazakii. The FDA said the Cronobacter infection "may have been a contributing cause of death." That infant was believed to have consumed product from the lot that is being recalled, the FDA said.</p> <p>The recall also comes only 9 days after the company recalled multiple formulas made at the same Abbott facility, including Similac, Alimentum and EleCare, after four infants were reportedly diagnosed with cronobacter sakazakii or salmonella Newport. Parents are encouraged to check their formulas, as exposure to Cronobacter can cause sepsis and meningitis. Infants displaying symptoms of poor feeding, irritability, or fevers should receive immediate care.</p> <p>In total, four infants have reported Cronobacter infections and one has reported a Salmonella Newport infection, according to the FDA. All five infants were hospitalized and two died, the FDA said.</p> <p>"We understand that infant formula is the sole source of nutrition for many infants and is an essential product," the FDA said in an advisory Monday. "FDA is working with Abbott Nutrition to better assess the impacts of the recall and understand production capacity at other Abbott facilities that produce some of the impacted brands. We are also working with Abbott Nutrition on safe resumption of production at the Sturgis, MI facility."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/01 Belarus joins Russia war
SOURCE	https://www.politico.eu/article/belarus-russia-war-ukraine/
GIST	<p>Belarus joined the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Tuesday, with the country's troops entering the Chernihiv region in northern Ukraine, Ukrainian authorities confirmed.</p> <p>In a tweet posted on Tuesday morning, the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, confirmed earlier reports that Belarusian troops were on Ukrainian soil.</p> <p>"Belarusian troops have entered Chernihiv region. The information was confirmed to the public by Vitaliy Kyrylov, spokesman for the North Territorial Defense Forces. More details later," the tweet said.</p> <p>According to local reports, a Belarusian column of 33 units had entered the region, located north of Kyiv, with mobile communications cut.</p> <p>The Belarusian rollout comes a couple days after authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko held a referendum on proposed changes to the constitution that would allow him consolidate control of the country and end Belarus' status as a nuclear-free zone — opening the way for a possible deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in the country.</p> <p>Unsurprisingly, Lukashenko's side won the referendum, according to Russian news agencies, citing Belarus' central elections commission that 65.16 percent of those who took part voted in favor.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Guatemala: 1M Sputnik doses expire
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/million-sputnik-coronavirus-vaccines-expire-guatemala-83172337
GIST	<p>GUATEMALA CITY -- Health authorities in Guatemala say over a million doses of the Russian Sputnik coronavirus vaccine have expired, because nobody wanted to take the shot.</p> <p>Francisco Coma, the country's health minister, said Monday that there was a "rejection" among the population toward the vaccine, even though a lot of Guatemalans remain unvaccinated.</p>

	<p>Only about 43% of the country's 12.6 million inhabitants over age 11 are fully vaccinated, in a country whose total population is 17 million.</p> <p>It was unclear if people had any particular doubts about the Russian vaccine, or if they were unwilling to take any vaccine.</p> <p>"We have tried to make available all the vaccines of different brands, to the public," Coma said. "Unfortunately, there has been a rejection among the public to vaccination."</p> <p>The wasted shots cost the government about \$11 million, Coma said.</p> <p>An additional 1.7 million doses of the second Sputnik dose, which is different from the first, will expire in March.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 US, allies pressure Russia Central Bank
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-allies-bar-russian-central-bank-accessing-reserves/story?id=83155896
GIST	<p>The Biden administration on Monday emphasized the drastic nature of economic sanctions levied against Russia over the weekend in which the U.S. and allies targeted Russia's Central Bank, preventing the Kremlin from accessing any of its more than \$600 billion in reserves in the U.S., or in U.S. dollars in foreign countries.</p> <p>The sanctions also target Russia's National Wealth Fund and the Ministry of Finance, and officials said it was clear from the beginning of the Ukraine invasion that Russian President Vladimir Putin was planning to use Central Bank assets to mitigate the impact of sanctions.</p> <p>"Today's announcement that prohibit transactions with the Central Bank of Russia in the National Wealth Fund will significantly hinder their ability to do that, and inhibit their access to hundreds of billions of dollars in assets from our actions alone, they will not be able to access assets that are either in United States are in U.S. dollars," officials told reporters.</p> <p>"This fund and its leadership are symbols of deep-seated Russian corruption and influence-peddling globally ... and it's known to be intimately connected to kleptocracy at the highest levels of the Russian government," an official added.</p> <p>"Our strategy -- to put it simply -- is to make sure that the Russian economy goes backwards, as long as President Putin decides to go forward with his invasion of Ukraine," a senior administration official said.</p> <p>Officials explained the sanctions -- a major step for the Biden administration -- were announced over the weekend when it became clear it was necessary to move before the markets opened Monday.</p> <p>"We learned over the course of the weekend from our allies and partners was the Russian Central Bank was attempting to move assets and there would be a great deal of assets starting on Monday morning from institutions around the world. So, we took these that we're taking these actions in a way that they will be effective immediately," an official said.</p> <p>Officials said the "actions represent the most significant actions the U.S. Treasury has taken against an economy of this size, and assets of this size," noting the Russian Central Bank is many times larger than Iran's or Venezuela's.</p> <p>Officials wouldn't specify how much of the \$630 billion "rainy-day fund" would be affected, but noted the U.S. knows that the Central Bank of the Russian Federation has its assets diversified around the world.</p> <p>"What we've done today is not only preventing them from using those dollars in the United States, but preventing them from being able to use those dollars in other places like Europe or Japan to defend their</p>

currency and prop up their institutions. And our - our goal was to make sure that not only would they not have access to dollars, but also not have access to other currencies," an official said.

The U.S. Treasury said in a statement its move "effectively immobilizes any assets" of Russia's Central Bank and "will disrupt Russia's attempts to prop up its rapidly depreciating currency."

One analyst said this will have more impact than denying Russia access to the SWIFT international banking system. This is "sanctions action without precedent," according to analyst Eddie Fishman, who said it "renders ALL of Russian government's rainy-day funds inert."

In a statement, Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized the action was being taken in coordination with European allies. Another analyst said the speed at which the European Union and U.S. have acted, and in lockstep, has been remarkable given the technical and complex nature of the new sanctions.

"You can't imagine how hard it is to manage these various moves, which have to balance different legal structures and traditions, national economic needs and capabilities, and complex international relationships. It is truly impressive how well stitched up this has been, even if you can occasionally see the seams," tweeted Richard Nephew, a sanctions expert at Columbia University who left the Biden administration's Iran talks team last month.

On the energy front, administration officials said they have multiple interests in keeping energy out of the sanctions packages for now: "A -- because we want to support the global economic recovery, but B -- because we don't want prices to spike for the benefit of President Putin as a major energy exporter."

Officials said over the long term, the U.S. and allies will look to degrade Russia's capacity to be a leading energy supplier, perhaps working to keep it from developing energy technologies.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	03/01 Anonymous declares cyberwar on Russia
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/03/01/russia-ukraine-anonymous-hackers-cyberwar/2341646134778/
GIST	<p>March 1 (UPI) -- The shadowy global hacking group called "Anonymous" has declared a cyber war against Russia for invading Ukraine and targeting civilian populations across the Eastern European nation.</p> <p>The mysterious group has already claimed responsibility for disabling a host of Russian and Belarusian government websites -- as well as sites belonging to other key Russian entities, including state oil company Gazprom and state-run news agency RT.</p> <p>A Twitter account belonging to the group, which has more than 7.4 million followers, called on the global hacking community last week to take actions against Russia.</p> <p>"Humanity, question for you? When can we all stop being [expletive] to each other and live in peace?" the group said in a tweet early Tuesday. "End all this senseless violence already."</p> <p>"Thermobaric bombs kill innocent civilians by suffocating them. We call on all digital activists to target Russian the government and its allies' assets," the group said in another tweet on Monday. "WE DO NOT FORGIVE. WE DO NOT FORGET. We are Anonymous."</p> <p>Denial of service attacks were still active against Russian sites by early this week, and official sites for the Kremlin and Russia's defense ministry were said to be crippled. Anonymous also claimed that it has hacked Moscow's defense database.</p>

	<p>Some Russian media websites appear to have been hacked, with three displaying an anti-war message on Monday.</p> <p>"Dear citizens. We urge you to stop this madness, don't send your sons and husbands to certain death," messages on Forbes Russia, Fontanka and Takie Dela read, according to CNN. "Putin makes us lie and puts us in danger."</p> <p>Jamie Collier, a consultant at U.S. cybersecurity firm Mandiant, cautioned that it's difficult to confirm who the aggressors are in such digital attacks.</p> <p>"It can be difficult to directly tie this activity to Anonymous, as targeted entities will likely be reluctant to publish related technical data," Collier told The Guardian.</p> <p>"However, the Anonymous collective has a track record of conducting this sort of activity and it is very much in line with their capabilities."</p> <p>Founded in 2003, Anonymous has been behind some high-profile digital attacks and Time magazine named the group among its 100 Most Influential People list in 2012.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Belarus hackers target government
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/belarusian-hacktivists-launch-another-attack-russia-cyber-hackivism/
GIST	<p>A group of Belarusian hackers and IT specialists claimed Sunday that they'd attacked the Belarusian Railways in an attempt to "slow down the transfer of occupying forces and give the Ukrainians more time to repel the attack," according to a Google translation of the message posted to the group's Telegram channel.</p> <p>The hackers — who call themselves the Cyber Partisans and have targeted Belarus' autocratic government and its leader, Alexander Lukashenko, dating back to September 2020 — said Sunday their hack "paralyzed" some railway operations in the Belarusian capital of Minsk and in Orsha, an eastern Belarusian city between Moscow and Minsk.</p> <p>Some railway operations were switched to manual mode, the group said, "which will significantly slow down the movement of trains, but will NOT create accidents."</p> <p>"The internal network will be disconnected until the Russian troops leave the territory of Belarus and the participation of the Belarusian military forces in the fascist aggression ceases," the group wrote.</p> <p>The extent and duration of the disruption is unclear. Bloomberg reported Sunday that some systems had been restored while others weren't operating and external train network websites were down, making it difficult to purchase tickets. The Independent reported that data on routing and switching devices had been encrypted.</p> <p>On Feb. 24 the group tweeted that Ukrainians and Belarusians had "a common enemy: Putin, Kremlin, the imperial regime," and asked for volunteers and financial donations.</p> <p>This is the second time the Cyber Partisans have apparently attacked the Belarusian Railways. In late January the group said it breached the agency's networks, encrypted data, and demanded the expulsion of Russian troops and the release of political prisoners.</p> <p>A chaotic picture</p> <p>The Cyber Partisans' attack is just the latest in a string of incidents in the increasingly chaotic independent cyber group portion of the intensifying Russian military attack on Ukraine. While the cyberattacks associated with governments have so far been a string of seemingly minor distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks in Ukraine and abroad — apart from wiper malware deployed against some Ukrainian</p>

government systems ahead of Russia's invasion — hackers and others have seemingly pulled off a series of high-profile if ultimately minor DDoS and defacement attacks of their own.

Various Twitter accounts operating under the broad and highly decentralized banner of [Anonymous have claimed various hacks](#), such as renaming Russian President Vladimir Putin's yacht to "FCKPTN," and temporarily limiting access to Russian broadcaster RT's website.

And at least two ransomware groups — Conti and the CoomingProject — pledged Friday to attack Russia's enemies, adding a new and complicated wrinkle to the mix. Conti's public position apparently upset someone with access to the group's data: [A major leak of Conti data](#) appeared Sunday, including hundreds of files outlining the group's training, recruitment, and chat logs. "Glory to Ukraine!" the leaker posted in a message linking to the materials.

Other ransomware groups, such as [ALPHV](#), pledged neutrality. Russian [vigilante hackers are also trying to get involved](#), according to the BBC.

Complicating matters further, [the Ukrainian government put out a list of Russian-related targets](#) for the volunteer "IT Army" Telegram channel that has more than 175,000 subscribers, although it's impossible to tell how many of these volunteers are doing any actual hacking on Ukraine's behalf. On the defensive side, Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said [it was moving its IT infrastructure](#) to a different location amid cyberattacks, leading to embassy website outages.

Experts worried that the hacktivist activity would only make things worse, and could escalate matters.

"Anyone not working on behalf of a government having serious conversations about 'hacking back' or launching cyber attacks against Russia please understand — respectfully — you're an idiot and only going to make matters worse," [Robert Lee, the founder and CEO of industrial cybersecurity firm Dragos, tweeted Friday](#). "Cyber is inherently escalatory and it doesn't matter how good it makes you feel it's irrelevant in the current situation. People are getting shot and bombed. The invasion is underway. This isn't the time for your cowboy bullshit."

Stefan Soesanto, a cybersecurity defense researcher with the Center for Security Studies, [tweeted last week](#) that he hopes the Cyber Partisans and other volunteers "are not operating out of any EU/NATO country," as "Moscow/Minsk might end up classifying them as enemy combatants in this war."

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HEADLINE	02/28 Toyota closes plants; potential cyberattack
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/toyota-to-close-japan-plants-after-suspected-cyberattack/178686/
GIST	<p>What was potentially a cyberattack hit one of Toyota's parts suppliers, causing the company to move to shut down about a third of the company's global production tomorrow, the company announced on Monday.</p> <p>Toyota doesn't know how long the 14 plants will be unplugged. The closure will mean that the company's output will shrink by around 13,000 cars.</p> <p>Reuters reported that within hours of Japan having joined Western allies in blocking some Russian banks from accessing the SWIFT international payment system and committing to giving Ukraine \$100 million in emergency aid, a spokesperson at Toyota supplier Kojima Industries Corp. said that it had apparently been hit by "some kind of cyber attack."</p> <p>Kojima supplies plastic parts and electronic components to Toyota.</p> <p>The attack hasn't been confirmed. Toyota, for its part, is calling the incident a "supplier system failure," according to Reuters. The shutdown will also reportedly affect some of the plants operated by Toyota affiliates Hino Motors and Daihatsu.</p>

Threatpost has reached out to Toyota for comment.

If the incident does turn out to be a cyberattack, it wouldn't be the first to affect Toyota. In 2020, its Australian subsidiary confirmed that it was under attack – an attack that [forced it](#) to send employees home.

Cleanup wasn't pretty. The subsidiary's IT infrastructure manager, Michael Mirabito, said at a 2021 conference that it was "[painful](#)" to rebuild its IT helpdesk systems and configuration management database (CMDB).

The giant automaker [uses](#) Just-in-Time (JiT) manufacturing, Reuters pointed out. That means that it doesn't stockpile parts sent by suppliers. Rather, Toyota makes cars one at a time, eschewing the stockpiling of parts and instead using supplier-provided parts in its production line as soon as they arrive.

The Weak Spot of Securing Supply Chains

It's an approach that has its downsides, experts said. As it is, supply chains have already been disrupted by the pandemic.

Danielle Jablanski, operational technology (OT) security strategist at OT and IoT security provider Nozomi Networks, told Threatpost on Monday that the incident highlights "a single point of failure for business interruption resulting in a loss of production."

It's also an example of "a major cyber risk for 'Just-In-Time' manufacturing," Jablanski asserted. "Toyota has thwarted direct attacks in the past, but the difficulty in securing entire supply chains from multiple vendors is a wider and more daunting task," Jablanski said. "Here in the United States, supply-chain attacks are on the mind of the federal government, think tanks and standards bodies looking for ways to address things like open-source software after the SolarWinds attack, and device vulnerabilities throughout the manufacturing industry."

The notorious SolarWinds [supply-chain attacks](#) entailed adversaries ([likely nation-state-backed](#)) that injected malicious code into normal software updates for the Orion network-management platform. This installed the Sunburst/Solorigate backdoor inside the platform, which the attackers were subsequently able to take advantage of in targeted attacks on the U.S. Departments of Treasury and Commerce, DHS, [FireEye](#) and others around the world.

Jablanski said more supply-chain attacks are sure to come, given the shrinking of the supplier pool: "We see the number of suppliers for some critical hardware components across manufacturing continue to decrease," she said. "There is no easy fix to this complexity, and we will likely continue to see similar incidents."

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HEADLINE	03/01 Malicious emails target Microsoft users
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/microsoft-accounts-targeted-russian-credential-harvesting/178698/
GIST	<p>Malicious emails warning Microsoft users of "unusual sign-on activity" from Russia are looking to capitalizing on the Ukrainian crisis.</p> <p>While legitimate concerns abound about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict sparking a far-reaching cyberwarfare conflagration around the globe, small-time crooks are also ramping up their efforts amid the crisis. Phishing emails to Microsoft users warning of Moscow-led account hacking have started to make the rounds, looking to lift credentials and other personal details.</p> <p>That's according to Malwarebytes, which uncovered a spate of spam email that name-checks Russian hacking efforts. The subject line for the messages is "Microsoft account unusual sign-in activity," researchers noted.</p>

The body reads:

Unusual sign-in activity

We detected something unusual about a recent sign-in to the Microsoft account

Sign-in details

- *Country/region: Russia/Moscow*
- *IP address:*
- *Date: Sat, 26 Feb 2022 02:31:23 +0100*
- *Platform: Kali Linux*
- *Browser: Firefox*

A user from Russia/Moscow just logged into your account from a new device, If this wasn't you, please report the user. If this was you, we'll trust similar activity in the future.

Report the user

Thanks,

The Microsoft account team

The emails then provide a button to “report the user,” and an unsubscribe option, according to Malwarebytes’ Tuesday analysis. Clicking the button creates a new message with the to-the-point subject line of “Report the user.” The recipient’s email address references Microsoft account protection.

Using the email to respond could open up various risks, according to Malwarebytes’ [Tuesday analysis](#).

“People sending a reply will almost certainly receive a request for login details, and possibly payment information, most likely via a bogus phishing page,” the researchers explained. “It’s also entirely possible the scammers will keep everything exclusively to communication via email. Either way, people are at risk from losing control of their account to the phishers. The best thing to do is not reply, and delete the email.”

As ever, the spam offers up red flags in the form of grammatical errors, including misspellings, such as “acount.” In other words, it’s not a particularly sophisticated effort, but it’s a savvy one. As is the case with any major world event, cresting interest (or fear) is catnip for social engineers.

“Given current world events, seeing ‘unusual sign-in activity from Russia’ is going to make most people do a double, and it’s perfect spam bait material for that very reason,” researchers said. “[The emails] (deliberately or not) could get people thinking about the current international crisis. Being on your guard will pay dividends over the coming days and weeks, as more of the below is sure to follow.”

The mail explicitly targets Microsoft account holders, but the good news is that Outlook is sending the emails directly to the spam folder, according to Malwarebytes. However, the firm pointed out that, “depending on personal circumstance and/or what’s happening in the world at any given moment, one person’s ‘big deal’ is another one’s ‘oh no, my stuff.’ That’s all it may take for some folks to lose their login, and this mail is perhaps more salient than most for the time being.”

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HEADLINE	03/01 Conti, Karma clash; dual ransomware attack
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/conti-encrypts-karma-ransomware/
GIST	<p>Security researchers have revealed how two ransomware groups clashed inside the same victim organization, with one encrypting the other’s ransom note.</p> <p>The unnamed Canadian healthcare organization (HCO) was struck by both Conti and Karma ransomware. However, while the latter stole data but did not encrypt due to the victim’s status as a healthcare provider, the former had no such qualms, according to Sophos senior threat researcher, Sean Gallagher.</p> <p>“To be hit by a dual ransomware attack is a nightmare scenario for any organization. Across the estimated timeline there was a period of around four days when the Conti and Karma attackers were simultaneously active in the target’s network, moving around each other, downloading and running scripts, installing Cobalt Strike beacons, collecting and exfiltrating data, and more,” he explained.</p>

“Karma deployed the final stage of its attack first, dropping an extortion notice on computers demanding a Bitcoin payment in exchange for not publishing stolen data. Then Conti struck, encrypting the target’s data in a more traditional ransomware attack. In a strange twist, the Conti ransomware encrypted Karma’s extortion notes.”

Karma’s attack began in August when a likely initial access broker found an unpatched Microsoft Exchange server they compromised via a ProxyShell exploit. Almost four months then passed before the Karma group picked up the lead, reconnecting with an admin account from a compromised workstation over RDP.

They dropped Cobalt Strike beacons with a PowerShell script on multiple servers, collected data and used a compromised server to upload the files to a Mega account, [Gallagher explained](#).

The HCO called Sophos to help with the attack once the ransom note landed on December 3, but just a day later, Conti struck, deploying ransomware to encrypt its servers.

The group managed to gain an initial foothold by exploiting ProxyShell on the same exposed server before dropping a web shell, downloading Cobalt Strike beacons, using PowerShell for lateral movement and then exfiltrating data.

“These dual ransom attacks highlight the risks associated with well-known internet-facing software vulnerabilities – at least, ones that are well-known to malicious actors but may not be to the organizations running the affected software,” Gallagher concluded.

“All sizes of organizations can fall behind on vulnerability management – which is why having multiple layers of defense against malicious activity is important. Malware protection on servers as well as clients can impede ransomware operators from using unprotected servers to launch their attacks.”

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HEADLINE	02/28 Insurance giant AON suffers cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/insurance-giant-aon-hit-by-a-cyberattack-over-the-weekend/
GIST	<p>Professional services and insurance giant AON has suffered a cyberattack that impacted a "limited" number of systems.</p> <p>AON is a multinational professional services firm offering a wide array of solutions, including business insurance, reinsurance, cybersecurity consulting, risk solutions, healthcare insurance, and wealth management products.</p> <p>AON generated \$12.2 billion of revenue in 2021 and has approximately 50,000 employees spread throughout 120 countries.</p> <p>AON suffers a weekend cyberattack</p> <p>In an 8-K form filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, AON has disclosed that they suffered a cyberattack on February 25th, 2022.</p> <p>AON has not provided any details of the attack other than that it occurred this past Friday and affected a limited number of systems.</p> <p>"On February 25, 2022, Aon plc (the "Company") identified a cyber incident impacting a limited number of systems. Promptly upon its identification of the incident, the Company launched an investigation, and engaged the services of third-party advisors, incident response professionals, and counsel. The incident has not had a significant impact on the Company's operations," reads the Form 8-K filed by AON.</p>

	<p>"Although the Company is in the early stages of assessing the incident, based on the information currently known, the Company does not expect the incident to have a material impact on its business, operations or financial condition."</p> <p>In addition to being an insurance broker, AON is also a leading reinsurance company, meaning that they insure the insurance companies.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has been told by a source in the reinsurance industry that it is common to receive data dumps of other insurers' clients when underwriting a reinsurance policy.</p> <p>This makes AON an attractive target for threat actors who commonly steal corporate data during cyberattacks.</p> <p>In an interview with the REvil ransomware gang, the threat actors said that insurers are "one of the tastiest morsels" as they provide lists of possible targets more likely to pay a ransom as they have cyber insurance policies.</p> <p>Insurance giant CNA was targeted in a ransomware attack in 2021 by the Evil Corp cybercrime syndicate. It has been reported they paid a \$40 million ransom to receive a decryptor and prevent their stolen data from being leaked.</p> <p>BleepingComputer contacted AON with further questions about the attack but has not heard back at this time.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 CISA, FBI: potential data wiping attacks
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-and-fbi-warn-of-potential-data-wiping-attacks-spillover/
GIST	<p>The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) warned US organizations that data wiping attacks targeting Ukraine could spill over to targets from other countries.</p> <p>The two federal agencies issued this warning in the form of a joint cybersecurity advisory published over the weekend following the unwarranted Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Although the two malware strains have only been deployed against Ukrainian networks so far, the threat actors deploying them could also accidentally hit other targets, and US organizations should be ready to prevent such devastating attacks.</p> <p>"Further disruptive cyberattacks against organizations in Ukraine are likely to occur and may unintentionally spill over to organizations in other countries," CISA and the FBI stated.</p> <p>"Organizations should increase vigilance and evaluate their capabilities encompassing planning, preparation, detection, and response for such an event."</p> <p>The warning comes on the heels of malware attacks against Ukraine using the HermeticWiper malware and ransomware decoys with the end goal of destroying data on targets' devices and rendering them unbootable.</p> <p>Ukraine was hit in January by another series of attacks deploying the WhisperGate wiper malware disguised as ransomware.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/01 Bogus 'copyright infringement' notices
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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/reality-winners-twitter-account-was-hacked-to-target-journalists/
GIST	<p>Twitter account of former intelligence specialist, Reality Winner was hacked over the weekend by threat actors looking to target journalists at prominent media organizations.</p> <p>Hackers took over Winner's verified Twitter account and changed the profile name to "Feedback Team" to impersonate Twitter staff before sending out suspicious DMs to verified users.</p> <p>Bogus 'Copyright Infringement' notices</p> <p>On Sunday, multiple journalists and verified Twitter users reported receiving suspicious DMs from a "verified" Twitter account called "Feedback Team."</p> <p>On taking a closer look at "Feedback Team's" account's handle <i>@reazlepuff</i> however, Jacob Silverman, staff reporter for <i>The New Republic</i> pointed out the hacked account appeared to belong to Reality Winner...</p> <p>Reality Leigh Winner is an American former intelligence specialist who, in 2018, was sentenced to five years and three months in prison for unauthorized release of classified information to the media.</p> <p>In 2017, Winner shared a National Security Agency (NSA) report about the Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections with the news outlet <i>The Intercept</i>. The report suggested that Russian hackers had illegally accessed U.S. voter registration rolls via email phishing attacks, although it didn't conclude if this had led to any tampering of electoral records.</p> <p>Within minutes of Silverman's tweet, <i>Daily Dot</i> staff writer Mikael Thalen also reported receiving the DM, as did writer Tara Dublin.</p> <p>These DMs impersonated Twitter staff and contained bogus "copyright infringement" notices enticing the recipients to click on a Google Sites link.</p> <p>The Google Sites webpage, seen by BleepingComputer, contained an embedded HTML iframe.</p> <p>The contents of the iframe impersonated Twitter's look and feel and asked the user to provide "feedback on the form" to prevent their account from getting "permanently suspended" over copyright infringement:</p> <p>The source URL of the malicious iframe, https://begetadmadir[.]tk/juri/ is no longer accessible, as confirmed by BleepingComputer.</p> <p>Credentials harvesting attack targets media companies</p> <p>This appears to be a credentials harvesting attack and this isn't the first time such an attack has occurred either.</p> <p>Mid-February some Indian journalists, including Sreedevi Jayarajan of <i>The News Minute</i> had their verified Twitter account taken over to target other verified profiles in a similar fashion.</p> <p>The use of the account profile name "Feedback Team," and the identical wording of the DMs sent at the time from Jayarajan's hacked account imply the same threat actor(s) may be behind these attacks.</p> <p>In January, British actor, comedian, and BBC presenter, Adil Ray "almost fell for this" phishing scam purportedly sent by another hacked verified account.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has previously reported threat actors sending fake DMCA and DDoS complaints to prominent Twitter accounts to spread malware. This scam, however, distinctly targets media personalities via phishing, to harvest credentials from journalists, with the possible goal of breaching news outlets.</p> <p>BleepingComputer reached out to Reality Winner to better understand what had happened:</p>

	<p>"It started with these log ins from Turkey and I couldn't secure my account quickly enough," Winner tells BleepingComputer.</p> <p>"I only had a verified account for like 6 days and thought I was gonna lose it. Also I'm really embarrassed that it sent the DM out to journalists, like I felt like I'd lost all credibility."</p> <p>Additionally, Winner also released a statement confirming the hack and expressed regret for anyone affected.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 China-linked cyberspies stealthy backdoor
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chinese-cyberspies-target-govts-with-their-most-advanced-backdoor/
GIST	<p>Security researchers have discovered Daxin, a China-linked stealthy backdoor specifically designed for deployment in hardened corporate networks that feature advanced threat detection capabilities.</p> <p>According to a technical report published by Symantec's Threat Hunter team today, Daxin is one of the most advanced backdoors ever seen deployed by Chinese actors.</p> <p>One point of differentiation in Daxin is its form, which is a Windows kernel driver, an atypical choice in the malware landscape. Its stealthiness comes from its advanced communication features, which mix its data exchange with regular internet traffic.</p> <p>"Daxin is, without doubt, the most advanced piece of malware Symantec researchers have seen used by a China-linked actor," Symantec said in a new report.</p> <p>"Considering its capabilities and the nature of its deployed attacks, Daxin appears to be optimized for use against hardened targets, allowing the attackers to burrow deep into a target's network and exfiltrate data without raising suspicions."</p> <p>Hiding in legitimate network traffic</p> <p>Backdoors provide threat actors with remote access to a compromised computer system, allowing them to steal data, execute commands, or download and install further malware.</p> <p>Because these tools are typically used to steal information from protected networks or further compromise a device, they need to involve some form of data transfer encryption or obfuscation to evade raising alarms on network traffic monitoring tools.</p> <p>Daxin does this by monitoring network traffic on a device for specific patterns. Once these patterns are detected, it will hijack the legitimate TCP connection and use it to communicate with the command and control server.</p> <p>By hijacking TCP communications, the Daxin malware can hide malicious communication in what is perceived as legitimate traffic and thus remain undetected.</p> <p>"Daxin's use of hijacked TCP connections affords a high degree of stealth to its communications and helps to establish connectivity on networks with strict firewall rules. It may also lower the risk of discovery by SOC analysts monitoring for network anomalies," explains the report by Symantec.</p> <p>This essentially opens an encrypted communication channel for transmitting or stealing data, all done through a seemingly innocuous TCP tunnel.</p> <p>"Daxin's built-in functionality can be augmented by deploying additional components on the infected computer. Daxin provides a dedicated communication mechanism for such components by implementing a device named <code>\\.\Tcp4</code>," further explained Symantec.</p>

“The malicious components can open this device to register themselves for communication. Each of the components can associate a 32-bit service identifier with the opened \\.\\Tcp4 handle. The remote attacker is then able to communicate with selected components by specifying a matching service identified when sending messages of a certain type.”

Daxin also stands out due to its capability to establish intricate communication pathways across multiple infected computers at once, using a single command to a set of nodes.

This allows the threat actors to quickly re-establish connections and encrypted communication channels in well-guarded networks.

At the same time, while the nodes are active and serve as relay points, the chances of the malicious traffic being marked as suspicious are kept at a minimum.

Chinese cyber-espionage

Symantec's threat analysts have found evidence linking Daxin to the Chinese state-backed hacking group Slug (aka [Owlproxy](#)).

Reportedly, the particular backdoor has been actively used in attacks since at least November 2019, while researchers spotted signs of its deployment again in May 2020 and July 2020.

The most recent attacks involving Daxin were observed in November 2021, targeting telecommunication, transportation, and manufacturing companies.

It's worth noting that Symantec claims the malware was first sampled back in 2013, already featuring the advanced detection-avoidance techniques that we see in today's version.

However, no attacks that involved Daxin were observed until later, even though it's likely that the stealthy hackers simply remained undetected until 2019.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Cybercrime more destructive, unpredictable
SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2022/02/28/cybercrime-more-destructive/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Fortinet's threat intelligence from the second half of 2021 reveals an increase in the automation and speed of attacks demonstrating more advanced persistent cybercrime strategies that are more destructive and unpredictable.</p> <p>In addition, the expanding attack surface of hybrid workers and hybrid IT is a focal point that cyber adversaries are attempting to exploit. For a detailed view of the report, as well as some important takeaways, read the blog.</p> <p>Derek Manky, Chief, Security Insights & Global Threat Alliances, Fortinet: “Cybersecurity is a fast-moving and dynamic industry, but recent threat events show unparalleled speeds at which cyber adversaries are developing and executing attacks today. New and evolving attack techniques span the entire kill chain but especially in the weaponization phase, showing an evolution to a more advanced persistent cybercrime strategy that is more destructive and unpredictable.</p> <p>“To protect against this broad scope of threats, organizations need to implement AI-powered prevention, detection, and response strategies based on a cybersecurity mesh architecture allowing for much tighter integration, increased automation, as well as a more rapid, coordinated, and effective response to threats across the extended network.”</p> <p>Log4j demonstrates dramatic speed of exploit organizations face</p>

The [Log4j](#) vulnerabilities that occurred in late 2021 demonstrate the rapidly increasing speed of exploit that cybercriminals are attempting to leverage to their advantage. Despite emerging in the second week of December, exploitation activity escalated quickly enough, in less than a month, to make it the most prevalent IPS detection of the entire second half of 2021.

In addition, Log4j had nearly 50x the activity volume in comparison to the well-known outbreak, ProxyLogon, that happened earlier in 2021. The reality is that organizations have very little time to react or patch today given the speeds that cyber adversaries are employing to maximize fresh opportunities. Organizations need AI and ML-powered intrusion prevention systems (IPS), aggressive patch management strategies, and the threat intelligence visibility to prioritize those threats propagating most quickly in the wild to reduce overall risk.

Adversaries rapidly targeting new vectors across the attack surface

Some lesser or low-lying threats have the potential to cause bigger problems in the future and are worthy of watching. An example is newly crafted malware designed to exploit Linux systems, often in the form of executable and linkable format (ELF) binaries. Linux runs the back-end systems of many networks and container-based solutions for IoT devices and mission-critical applications, and it is becoming a more popular target for attackers. In fact, the rate of new [Linux](#) malware signatures in Q4 quadrupled that of Q1 2021 with ELF variant Muhstik, RedXOR malware, and even Log4j being examples of threats targeting Linux.

The prevalence of ELF and other Linux malware detections doubled during 2021. This growth in variants and volume suggests that Linux malware is increasingly part of adversaries' arsenal. Linux needs to be secured, monitored and managed as any other endpoint in the network with advanced and automated endpoint protection, detection and response. In addition, security hygiene should be prioritized to provide active threat protection for systems that may be affected by low-lying threats.

Botnet trends show a more sophisticated evolution of attack methods

Threat trends demonstrate that botnets are evolving to adopt newer and more evolved cybercriminal attack techniques. Instead of being primarily monolithic and focused mostly on DDoS attacks, botnets are now multipurpose attack vehicles leveraging a variety of more sophisticated attack techniques, including ransomware. For example, threat actors, including operators of botnets like Mirai, integrated exploits for the Log4j vulnerability into their attack kits.

Also, botnet activity was tracked associated with a new variant of the RedXOR malware, which targets Linux systems for data exfiltration. Detections of botnets delivering a variant of RedLine Stealer malware also surged in early October morphing to find new targets using a [COVID-themed file](#). To protect networks and applications, organizations must implement [zero trust](#) access solutions to provide least access privileges especially to secure IoT endpoints and devices entering the network as well as automated detection and response capabilities to monitor anomalous behavior.

Malware trends show cybercriminals maximizing “remote everything”

Evaluating the prevalence of malware variants by region reveals a sustained interest by cyber adversaries in maximizing the [remote work](#) and learning attack vector. In particular, various forms of browser-based malware were prevalent. This often takes the form of phishing lures or scripts that inject code or redirect users to malicious sites.

Specific detections vary across global regions, but can be largely grouped into leveraging three broad distribution mechanisms: Microsoft Office executables (MSExcel/, MSOffice/), PDF files, and browser scripts (HTML/, JS/). Such techniques continue to be a popular way for cybercriminals to exploit people's desire for the latest news about the pandemic, politics, sports, or other headlines, and to then find entryways back to corporate networks.

With hybrid work and learning remaining a reality, there are fewer layers of protection between malware and would-be victims. Organizations must take a “work-from-anywhere” approach to their security by deploying solutions capable of following, enabling, and protecting users no matter where they are located.

They need advanced security on the endpoint (EDR) combined with zero trust access solutions, including ZTNA. Secure SD-WAN is also critical to ensure secure WAN connectivity for the extended network.

Ransomware activity still high and getting more destructive

Data reveal that ransomware has not subsided from peak levels over the last year and instead, the sophistication, aggressiveness, and impact of ransomware is increasing. Threat actors continue to attack organizations with a variety of new as well as [previously seen ransomware strains](#), often leaving a trail of destruction.

Old ransomware is being actively updated and enhanced, sometimes with wiper malware included, while other ransomware is evolving to adopt Ransomware-as-a-Service (RaaS) business models. RaaS enables more threat actors to leverage and distribute the malware without having to create the ransomware themselves.

A consistent level of malicious activity involving multiple ransomware strains was observed, including new versions of Phobos, Yanluowang and BlackMatter. The operators of BlackMatter professed they would not attack target organizations in the healthcare sector and other critical infrastructure sectors but did so anyway.

Ransomware attacks remain a reality for all organizations regardless of industry or size. Organizations need to take a proactive approach with real-time visibility, analysis, protection and remediation coupled with zero trust access solutions, segmentation, and regular backing up of data.

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HEADLINE	02/27 Nvidia hacked hackers; stole data back?
SOURCE	https://www.techspot.com/news/93568-nvidia-allegedly-hacked-hackers-stole-data-back.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Rumor mill: Several online security groups are reporting that the South American hacker group Lapsus\$ is claiming to have been behind the recent cyberattack on Nvidia. It's also claiming that Nvidia hacked them in return, encrypted the stolen data, and ransomed back their machines. For now, this is just hearsay, but makes for a great turning-the-tables story.</p> <p>Nvidia told the Telegraph on Friday that it was investigating a security incident, which the Telegraph believes involved Nvidia's internal systems being "completely compromised." Official sources haven't said more.</p> <p>Yesterday, Lapsus\$ claimed to have stolen 1 TB of data from Nvidia and were threatening to leak Nvidia employees' passwords and security details. It had some screenshots to support its claims, but they weren't conclusive; the group may or may not have had that data.</p> <p>Shortly afterward, Lapsus\$ said that Nvidia hacked it in return. The group supposedly left one of its virtual machines enrolled in Nvidia's mobile device management program, which gave Nvidia a backdoor into its systems. Nvidia remotely encrypted the stolen data and cut off Lapsus\$'s access to Nvidia's network, but the hackers claim to have made a copy of the data.</p> <p>In early December, Lapsus\$ also took responsibility for a hack on Brazil's health ministry that involved national immunization program data being deleted and possibly stolen. Lapsus\$ said it would return the data for a fee, but the Brazilian government claims not to have paid and instead recovered the data and rebuilt its systems independently a month later.</p> <p>This time, Lapsus\$ hasn't demonstrated a coherent strategy. Initially, it said that it would hold the data ransom. Then, the group insulted Nvidia and used the company's political stance to justify the attack. Now, the hackers are saying they're offended that Nvidia would hack them back and are leaking the data in retaliation.</p>

	<p>Some sources say that Lapsus\$ has leaked Nvidia employees' security details on Telegram, but that's yet to be verified. While not confirmed, it seems like Nvidia has had more than enough time to update its employees' security details and make the leaked data useless.</p> <p>Lapsus\$ also claims to have proprietary information about Nvidia GPUs, but that data should be legally protected if related to their functionality. At this point, Lapsus\$ seems to be struggling to convince Nvidia that they have enough leverage to justify a ransom.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/01 FoxBlade targeted Ukraine before invasion
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/128538/cyber-warfare-2/foxbld-malware-used-hours-before-invasion.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Microsoft revealed that Ukrainian entities were targeted with a previous undetected malware, dubbed FoxBlade, several hours before the invasion.</p> <p>The Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC) continues to investigate the attacks that are targeting Ukrainian networks and discovered that entities in Ukraine were targeted with a previously undetected malware, dubbed FoxBlade, several hours before Russia's invasion.</p> <p><i>"This trojan can use your PC for distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks without your knowledge." reads the advisory published by Microsoft.</i></p> <p>The IT giant immediately advised the Ukrainian government about the ongoing attacks and provided it with technical advice on how to detect and neutralize the malicious code. Microsoft pointed out that its experts have written signatures to detect the malware within three hours of this discovery.</p> <p><i>"Several hours before the launch of missiles or movement of tanks on February 24, Microsoft's Threat Intelligence Center (MSTIC) detected a new round of offensive and destructive cyberattacks directed against Ukraine's digital infrastructure," said Microsoft President and Vice-Chair Brad Smith. "These recent and ongoing cyberattacks have been precisely targeted, and we have not seen the use of the indiscriminate malware technology that spread across Ukraine's economy and beyond its borders in the 2017 NotPetya attack."</i></p> <p>FoxBlade is the third malware that was discovered at this time which was involved in attacks against Ukrainian entities. Two other destructive malware, tracked as WhisperGate and HermeticWiper, were used in data wiping attacks against organizations in Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Phones affected by 3G shutdown?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/02/28/3g-shutdown-faq/
GIST	<p>After years of helping us swap text messages and catch up with people on meandering phone calls, 3G networks across the country are starting to go dark.</p> <p>AT&T was the first to go when it began shutting off its 3G network last week. That means some of the older phones, security systems and car assistance tools that people rely on will no longer work the way they're supposed to, if at all.</p> <p>Ever since the Help Desk launched last September, we've received loads of questions from people wondering about the impending 3G shutdown. Will their phones be affected? Will they still have service where they live? Are there ways to prolong the lives of their existing devices? We've answered as many of these as we could, but even now as the shutdown has begun, many people still don't know where they stand.</p> <p>That's why this week's column is devoted to the demise of 3G, a slow process that will run through at least the end of 2022. If you have your own questions about what all of this means for you and your</p>

gadgets, drop us a line at yourhelpdesk@washpost.com. We'll do our best to get you the answers you need. For now, though, here's what you need to know about the network shutdown happening all around us right now.

What has happened so far?

AT&T started to turn off its 3G network that has provided phone and mobile data service since 2004. There's no single plug AT&T can pull to put an end to 3G all at once, which means there are many areas where the service continues to function normally.

For Petar Marinov, a phone enthusiast with over 500 models in his collection, that didn't come as much of a surprise. We chatted two days after AT&T's cutoff date on one of his favorite collector's items, a Motorola Razr flip phone from 2006 that still works just fine on a 3G network in Missouri. As it turns out, these prolonged shutdowns are just how the wireless industry works.

"I remember the 2G shutdown and it was staggered throughout the country," he said of AT&T's last major network shutdown in 2017. "I know that other people have claimed they had service for two days after or for three days after" [the announcement].

That means if you're one of the few still clinging to an 3G-only AT&T phone, you may still have some time to prepare. If you have a 3G-only phone with Verizon or T-Mobile, you have more time and can read about the specific dates below. But there's no telling exactly how long 3G will continue to operate, so it's best to switch to a new device if you haven't already.

When are the other dates?

3G service as whole will end this year, and if you have a device that will be affected, you've probably already heard from your service provider. Still, it's always smart to keep deadlines in mind for when the rest of the country's older "legacy" networks are slated to go dark. The cutoff for Sprint 3G is March 31 and Sprint LTE is June 30, while the cutoff for T-Mobile is July 1 and Verizon 3G is Dec. 31.

Will my phone be affected?

If there's one thing about this network shutdown that wireless carriers should have made easier to understand, it's how to tell if your phone might stop working. In some cases, it's pretty obvious. If your old phone still has a black and white screen, for instance, you'll probably need to get a new one.

But even then, there's still plenty of room for confusion, especially because some 4G phones will also be affected. Here are a few ways to figure out if you'll need to upgrade.

Figure out when you purchased it. With 3G going dark, your phone has to be able to make calls over at least 4G LTE networks. That feature was launched across the major wireless providers in 2014, so if you bought your phone before that, you'll probably need a replacement.

Keep an eye out for texts or emails. To their credit, these companies have been reaching out to people whose devices won't work after their cutoffs. If you think you might be at risk, keep your eyes peeled for messages from your wireless carrier. In some cases, they may even redirect your outgoing phone calls to a customer service line to walk you through the changes.

Ask your service provider directly. It'll have the most updated information about what phones will and won't be supported after the shutdown. AT&T, Verizon and T-Mobile all have at least partial lists of supported models. If you bought a smartphone from say, Amazon, instead of your service provider, you should jump right to this step. Even if they're reasonably modern, some international or "unlocked" models might not come with the right software that lets them make calls over 4G LTE.

What about other devices?

Phones aren't the only thing that rely on 3G networks, meaning a bevy of the gadgets and features you've come to rely on may stop working correctly if they haven't already.

Home alarm systems and medical monitoring tools might be the most concerning things on that list, since many of them use cellular connections to contact emergency services. Right now, though, some of those systems are still stuck in limbo.

AT&T signed a deal with T-Mobile to let some of those systems lean on that company's 3G network instead, but that's not exactly ideal. For one, T-Mobile plans to discontinue that network over the summer, so that deal mostly just delays the inevitable. Representatives for the Alarm Industry Communications Committee pointed out other potential issues to the Federal Communications Commission.

"Other 3G alarm radios may not be programmable for such roaming," especially personal emergency response system units "widely used by the elderly, especially Medicaid patients and those requiring monitoring of medical conditions," their [petition reads](#). "The solution will also not help those 3G-based alarm customers where T-Mobile does not have 3G coverage."

And now, as the 3G shutdown has officially begun, it's still unclear how many people have been left in the dark. Celia Besore, chief executive of the Monitoring Association, a security system trade group, said there is no "accurate assessment of what has not been upgraded."

"Many organizations have reported that they completed the project and others have not but are continuing to work on them," she added. "Additionally, a small subset of radios were successfully migrated to T-Mobile, which will extend those out until July 1."

If your car came with special features like a Wi-Fi hotspot or an "SOS" button for use in emergencies, those may also stop working. The most comprehensive list of affected models we found was published by enthusiast site [the Drive](#), though you should also make sure to check your carmaker's website. Some of them offer tools to help figure out if your specific make and model are affected.

When is the next shutdown?

According to experts, not for a long time. You've probably heard a lot of people talking about 5G lately, and it's hard to find a new smartphone in a store that doesn't play nice with those new wireless networks. But that doesn't mean the 4G LTE networks many of us still rely on are going anywhere for a while.

"While 5G is growing quickly and 3G-only devices will become obsolete as 3G networks are discontinued, mobile operators won't sunset 4G LTE devices anytime soon," said Patrick Linder, a senior director at the network testing firm RootMetrics. "With LTE playing such a massive role across the connectivity landscape at large, it will likely be at least another 10 to 15 years before LTE users are forced to upgrade to 5G."

That means if you have a phone that works just fine on 4G LTE right now, you won't need to worry about it becoming completely obsolete until well into the 2030s. I'd like to think you'll have upgraded your phone at least once before then, because everyone deserves to treat themselves now and then, so don't sweat it this year.

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HEADLINE	03/01 Social media bans Russia outlets in Europe
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/01/youtube-tiktok-facebook-state-media-ban/
GIST	<p>Major social media companies including YouTube, Facebook and TikTok moved to ban Russian state media outlets in Europe, blocking Moscow's biggest megaphone for influencing public opinion about the war in Ukraine in a critical region on its borders.</p> <p>The moves by the social media giants came after mounting pressure from the European Commission, the Ukrainian government, some U.S. politicians, and their own employees.</p> <p>The moves are likely to provoke retaliation from Russia, which has already restricted social media services in response to previous measures the companies have taken to curtail the Kremlin's ability to spread misinformation and propaganda about its invasion of Ukraine.</p>

“Due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, we’re blocking YouTube channels connected to RT and Sputnik across Europe, effective immediately,” Google Europe said in a tweet. “It’ll take time for our systems to fully ramp up. Our teams continue to monitor the situation around the clock to take swift action.”

State media outlets RT and Sputnik have relied on American social networks, as well as Chinese-owned TikTok, to gain massive followings and reach audiences outside Russia’s borders. RT’s Facebook channel has more than 7 million followers, though it’s not clear how many were located in the European Union. RT’s YouTube account has 4.65 million followers in English and 5.94 million in Spanish. RT and Sputnik also run prominent television channels and radio stations in several countries.

But Silicon Valley companies have long been reluctant to curtail state-owned media outlets, even when they are mouthpieces for a foreign government’s distorted worldview. Instead, they have chosen to label outlets as state media.

At the start of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the companies continued fact-checking individual pieces of content and resisted calls for outright bans.

Misinformation from Russian state-backed media outlets proliferated, including misleading articles alleging that Ukrainian armed forces attacked civilians or tried to destroy critical infrastructure in separatist regions or in Russia, according to research from the Oxford Internet Institute at Oxford University. At least 30 articles speculated that Ukraine may have started or plans to develop nuclear weapons, warning about “what nuclear bombs in the hands of the far right lead to,” or alleged that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a “dangerous nuclear fantasy,” Oxford found. Russian state media has also tried to paint a picture of Ukraine as being associated with far-right organizations and Nazis, though Zelensky is Jewish.

But the pressure on social media companies to use their power as gatekeepers mounted swiftly. First, the Ukrainian government asked the firms to ban the channels within its borders, and the companies complied.

Then, Russia began to slow traffic to tech companies’ services within Russia in retaliation for fact-checking state media reports, according to Facebook.

On Friday, Facebook and YouTube banned advertising from Russian state media, an effort that prevented the companies from earning revenue from content that supported the invasion.

On Monday, Facebook and TikTok said they would shut down access to RT and Sputnik in Europe. Facebook’s announcement came in a tweet from its president for global affairs, Nick Clegg. TikTok confirmed its decision to The Washington Post late Monday.

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HEADLINE	02/28 When will Russia cyber onslaught unfold?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/02/28/internet-war-cyber-russia-ukraine/
GIST	<p>For more than a decade, military commanders and outside experts have laid out blueprints for how cyberwar would unfold: military and civilian networks would be knocked offline, cutting-edge software would sabotage power plants, and whole populations would be unable to get money, gas or refrigerated food.</p> <p>But while Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has spawned all manner of cyberattacks and defenses, few are playing out the way the experts thought they would.</p> <p>As of Monday, five days after tanks moved into Ukraine, the Internet and other key Ukrainian infrastructure were still functioning, the outgunned Ukrainian military was still coordinating effectively and Russia’s vaunted disinformation capabilities were failing to persuade Ukrainians that resistance is futile.</p>

“We imagined this orchestrated unleashing of violence in cyberspace, this ballet of attacks striking Ukraine in waves, and instead of that we have a brawl. And not even a very consequential brawl, just yet,” said Jason Healey, a former White House staffer for infrastructure protection and intelligence officer who’s now a research scholar on cyber conflict at Columbia University.

A vastly larger, more powerful military — one especially feared for its cyber-military prowess — has allowed Ukrainians almost unfettered access to the Internet. This has helped them get weapons to citizens and harness social media to rally global political support through direct, emotional appeals backed by stirring visuals.

“It’s certainly not what anyone predicted,” said Dmitri Alperovitch, a longtime cybersecurity executive and U.S. government adviser who heads Silverado Policy Accelerator.

Ukraine’s core cyberdefense has done better than expected because it focused on the issue after Russian hackers briefly knocked out power to swaths of the country in 2015 and 2016, said David Cowan, a veteran cybersecurity venture capitalist and corporate director, and because it has had help from American and European experts.

“I would have thought that by now Russia would have disabled a lot more infrastructure around communications, power and water,” Cowan said. “If Russia were attacking the U.S., there would be more cyber damage.”

The absence of major disruptions predicted by cyberwar doctrine has allowed Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky to deliver propaganda coups with little more than a smartphone and a data link. Images of civilian casualties, the brutal shelling of cities and also some Russian losses have undermined that nation’s claims of a limited and humane “special military operation.” A viral audio clip of Ukrainian soldiers on a tiny island telling a Russian warship to “go f--- yourself” has become a defining moment of national resistance.

“It’s become a global participatory thing. Everybody thinks they’re part of it,” said Doug Madory, director of Internet analysis for Kentik, which tracks global data flows. “It would be a lot harder to do all that if there was a blackout.”

Ukraine has not escaped unscathed, and some experts warn that cyberattacks or Internet outages could grow as Russia’s invasion intensifies in the face of unexpectedly stout resistance.

Russia or its allies already have deployed software to wipe data off some Ukrainian computers, including border control offices. But such intrusions are not nearly as widespread as in past attacks such as NotPetya, in which fake ransomware attributed to the Russian government caused billions of dollars in damages, much of it in Ukraine.

Russian military was behind ‘NotPetya’ cyberattack in Ukraine, CIA concludes

“I do not think the destructive malware had an impact of any significance,” said Vikram Thakur, head of threat intelligence at Broadcom’s Symantec division.

Russia also may be holding back to some extent, for strategic reasons or because the timeline for the invasion was so closely held that cyber teams did not know what to target or when.

An invading army might be expected to quickly cut backbone cables or switch them off through hacks, said Madory, a former Air Force communications engineering officer.

But neither has happened. And Madory isn’t sure why.

“Is it following the playbook? I don’t know if we have the right playbook,” Madory said. “So far the Internet is still up.”

“You need to develop access and know how those targets are going to fit into the overall plan of the campaign,” said Trey Herr, director of the Cyber Statecraft Initiative at the Atlantic Council.

He and other experts point to several possible explanations, starting with the possibility that the Russians thought Ukraine would fall so quickly that it wasn’t necessary to damage systems they would want operational once an occupation began. Disabled telecommunication systems — or ones that are bombed — can require costly, time-consuming repairs.

It’s also possible that the Russians themselves needed a functioning telecommunications system, including high-speed data links, for their own communications. Images from Ukraine have shown Russian soldiers appearing to use smartphones. Modern militaries typically have sophisticated radios for battlefield communications, but glitches might have forced reliance on Internet-based systems instead.

Finally, there are downsides to using even the most sophisticated cyberweapons. A system shut down by a hacker can’t be used for ongoing intelligence gathering, typically a high priority in wartime. Even destroyed computers can be replaced — sometimes within just a few hours.

“If I wipe a bunch of their computers today, I can’t do that tomorrow,” said Jake Williams, a former National Security Agency hacker, now on the faculty of the information security research group IANS. “A big question is: When do you pull the trigger?”

The best time, he said, is typically at the beginning of a conflict, when depriving victims of the ability to detect attacks and communicate with the outside world can be demoralizing. By the time tanks are rolling in the streets and cities are being bombed, the most effective moment for cyberattacks often has passed.

Many experts said they expected more serious cyberattacks to come in the next few weeks, in Ukraine and elsewhere.

“Putin has not initiated significant retaliation yet for any U.S., E.U., NATO sanctions, probably because he is too busy dealing with the surprising level of Ukrainian resistance and failures by the Red Army,” said Richard Clarke, the first White House cyber coordinator and author of one of the first books on cyberwarfare.

“We still believe retaliation, including cyberattacks, is coming.”

Columbia’s Healey said that the more Russia is isolated from Western markets and financial networks, the less it has to lose by attacking them.

But for now, Ukraine has rallied to its side a stunningly broad, hodgepodge alliance to fight back on the Internet.

Tech savvy cabinet member Mykhailo Fedorov successfully appealed to Tesla founder Elon Musk to distribute Starlink satellite Internet terminals that would withstand cellular network disruptions, and he asked PayPal and credit card companies to stop processing payments in Russia.

More surprisingly, Fedorov welcomed the contributions from activist hackers, forming a volunteer “IT Army” and urging it to hack Russian government and commercial sites.

Existing cyber activist networks have taken up the cause with glee. One of the most popular Twitter accounts promoting the loose Anonymous movement, YourAnonNews, has been suggesting unorthodox tactics to its more than 7 million followers, such as leaving business reviews on Google maps that pass along to ordinary Russians banned information about events in Ukraine.

	<p>Though some covert government operatives could be using the cover of Anonymous to contribute to attacks, one of the account's administrators said it was not working directly with any officials. "We see many Anonymous activists participating, and the support is overwhelming," the person said.</p> <p>On Monday, some Russian news sites were hacked and briefly defaced with calls for Russia to pull back.</p> <p>Even the most widely expected alliance, between the Russian government and organized criminal ransomware groups that have long been tolerated or encouraged there, are not following the script.</p> <p>The ransomware gang Conti was first out of the gate with a public comment, declaring that it was loyal to Russia and that it would respond to any attacks on it with renewed penetration of U.S. critical infrastructure.</p> <p>But like many Russian-speaking crime groups, Conti has members in Ukraine, some of whom objected fiercely, said Dmitry Smilyanets, a former Russian hacker who analyzes the gangs for security company Recorded Future.</p> <p>The pushback prompted a revised statement that Conti was beholden to no government. But one angry participant in the group's closed chats still leaked more than a year's worth of private discussions that named victims and included drafts of payment demands.</p> <p>"That leak will destroy Conti," Smilyanets said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Anti-Putin hackers escalate cyber battle
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/28/anti-putin-hackers-escalate-cyber-battle-against-s/
GIST	<p>Anti-Kremlin hackers are escalating their cyberwar against the supporters of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his government, including leaks of personal information and knocking more pro-Russian websites offline.</p> <p>Hackers have already leaked internal communications of the ransomware gang Conti after the group said it sided with the Russian government amid its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Alleged internal chat messages of the gang, which the FBI has said previously targeted American health care networks, were distributed on social media and sent to reporters and others.</p> <p>"There are more dumps coming, stay tuned," wrote a leaker to The Washington Times on Sunday.</p> <p>The cyber intelligence company Recorded Future, which has interacted with the Conti gang, said it confirmed the authenticity of the initial leak of conversations dating back to January 2021. Emsisoft threat analyst Brett Callow also told The Washington Times the communications are definitely legitimate.</p> <p>While the leakers did not identify themselves, speculation abounds that a Ukrainian ransomware operator who disagrees with the gang's Russian members is responsible for the leak. According to Recorded Future's The Record, the leaker is believed to be Ukrainian and the messages reveal Conti's relationship with other cybercriminals, among other things.</p> <p>Other hackers attacking the Russian government are taking credit for knocking government websites offline. The Russian government's website, government.ru, was inaccessible on Monday, as social media accounts affiliated with the activist hacking group Anonymous shared news of the website's outage starting on Sunday.</p> <p>Anonymous has previously declared a cyberwar against the Russian government, and the @YourAnonOne account on Twitter said more than six Russian government websites were offline on Saturday.</p>

The @YourAnonOne account previously said Anonymous was responsible for disrupting the Russian Ministry of Defense website and the state-controlled RT news website. However, Mr. Callow noted some people with a Russian internet protocol address were able to access RT when others were not.

The hacks are not likely to stop anytime soon. Ukrainian Digital Minister Mykhailo Fedorov called on Twitter for people to join an “IT Army” of Ukraine and he said tasks would get distributed publicly on the cloud-based messaging platform Telegram.

Among the targets listed on the IT Army of Ukraine’s Telegram channel on Monday were crypto exchanges that the group said were connected to Russian banks.

“Make them cry!” read the message from the IT Army of Ukraine’s channel.

Ukraine has continued to get hit with cyberattacks, too. Ukraine’s State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection said via Twitter on Monday that some embassy websites were recovering from cyberattacks and the government was moving its information technology infrastructure to new locations.

The Biden administration has warned people to prepare for cyberattacks against Ukraine spreading elsewhere. The FBI and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency issued a joint advisory Saturday that said future cyberattacks against Ukraine “may unintentionally spill over to organizations in other countries” and it provided recommendations to defend against the attackers.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Pro-Ukraine, anti-Russia narrative take hold
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/28/putins-disinformation-machine-falters-pro-ukraine-/
GIST	<p>Images of brave Ukrainian soldiers from Kyiv to Snake Island have flooded social media in the days since Russian forces crossed into the country last week. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been transformed from an in-over-his-head comedian turned politician into a wartime folk hero rallying his people in a fight for freedom while successfully pressuring the West to send more weapons.</p> <p>In Russia, meanwhile, images Monday showed desperate citizens lined up to pull cash from ATMs as the nation’s economy cratered and the ruble’s value fell to a new low. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s widely mocked justifications for war — including a bizarre claim that he is leading a “denazification” of Ukraine — have been roundly rejected, even by his citizens. Many Russians have joined street protests and cybercampaigns denouncing the bloodshed.</p> <p>The Kremlin’s vaunted cyberspace and disinformation forces were supposed to give Moscow a massive edge in its clash with Ukraine. But nearly a week into the fight, Ukraine has seized full control of the public relations high ground as anti-Russian sentiment spreads like wildfire across social media.</p> <p>The narrative of a plucky Ukraine holding off a blundering Russian army has taken hold around the world, and specialists say the Kremlin’s utter failure to sell its spin on events is beginning to have a tangible impact on the war on the ground.</p> <p>“What’s happened here is the same thing that happened with George Floyd. ... It’s hard to have disinformation when you have video cameras and social media that gets the real story out,” said Jim Townsend, who served as deputy assistant secretary of defense for European and NATO policy during the Obama administration.</p> <p>“Disinformation doesn’t work unless you’ve got a good narrative and good videos and you have an opposition that isn’t doing anything about it, that is just sitting there taking it. The United States was like that in 2016 when they came after our elections,” Mr. Townsend told The Washington Times on Monday. “What’s happened here is iPhones are being used to tell the real story, and there’s nothing the Russians can do about it.”</p>

Indeed, Mr. Putin's claim that Russian "peacekeepers" were needed to rescue the disputed Donbas region from a Ukrainian-led "genocide" has gained little traction, even within his own country. Within hours of the invasion, social media platforms were flooded with images of Russian tanks rolling into Ukraine, Russian jets hitting Ukrainian targets and, more recently, the apparent indiscriminate shelling of key cities such as Kharkiv.

While Russia's effort to concoct its own narrative fell flat, its feared cyberwarfare capabilities failed to stop Ukraine from getting its message out to a global audience. Fears that Mr. Putin's Russia had perfected a new kind of "hybrid war" combining real-world and virtual lines of attack have dissolved the past week.

"In terms of the information and what we're able to see and document, a part of Russia's hybrid warfare that I feel like everyone and their mom has been talking about for several years doesn't seem to be working here," Mason Clark, a Russia analyst at the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War, told Vox.com.

Instead, Ukrainian soldiers stationed on Snake Island captured the world's attention last week by delivering a profane message of defiance to an approaching Russian warship. In the southern port city of Henichesk, a Ukrainian woman became a symbol of the resistance in a viral video after confronting a heavily armed Russian soldier and offering him sunflower seeds.

"Take these seeds and put them in your pockets, so at least sunflowers will grow when you all lie down here," she told the soldier, according to English-language media translations of the exchange.

Tale of two leaders

On the public relations front, perhaps no one has seized the moment more than Mr. Zelenskyy. Until the Russian invasion, the former comic was perhaps best known for being on the other end of the line during a 2019 phone call that ultimately led to President Trump's impeachment by the House. Mr. Trump was acquitted by the Senate of charges that he tried to strong-arm Mr. Zelenskyy into launching an investigation into the Biden family.

Leading up to the Russian invasion, Mr. Zelenskyy projected calm and tamped down panic among his population. When Russia made its move, the Ukrainian president rejected a U.S. offer to evacuate him from the country.

"I need ammunition, not a ride," he said in a now-famous quote that has become a meme, a line of T-shirts and a rallying cry for Ukrainians who are putting up an unexpectedly tough fight against the better armed and more numerous Russian invaders.

Mr. Zelenskyy uses his Twitter account, which has as its banner the phrase "Ukraine is defending Europe and the world," to provide regular updates on his government's wartime preparations and his phone calls with other world leaders. More importantly, analysts say, Mr. Zelenskyy has successfully used social media chatter, public remarks and video addresses to push the West to send more arms and to clamp down harder on the Russian economy through sanctions.

That pressure appears to be at least partly responsible for key developments over the weekend, such as Germany's decision to reverse course and send weapons to Ukraine, the European Union's shutdown of airspace to Russian airlines, and the U.S. and European restrictions on Russia's access to key international banking mechanisms.

"That's how he's become a folk hero. He's in your living room. You're looking at your iPhone, listening to him," Mr. Townsend said of the Ukrainian leader. "He's this Shakespearean figure surrounded by tanks."

“What has happened is the inspiration shown by these stubborn Ukrainians and their cleverness and heroism, and where Zelenskyy has gone from being this comic to suddenly being this warrior president. That has had a huge impact in Europe,” Mr. Townsend said.

Other Ukrainian leaders have proved adept at using social media to amplify their messages and chip away at Russian morale. Ukraine’s ambassador to the United Nations, Sergiy Kyslytsya, used a Monday speech at the United Nations to read text messages purportedly found on a Russian soldier’s phone after he was killed in the fighting.

“Mama, I’m in Ukraine. There is a real war raging here. I’m afraid. We are bombing all of the cities ... even targeting civilians,” said Mr. Kyslytsya, quoting the Russian soldier’s text messages to his mother.

In Moscow, Mr. Putin is at the other end of the spectrum. The increasingly isolated leader has been the target of widespread condemnation by other world leaders, across social media and even in Russia. Even China, which blamed the U.S. and the West for provoking the conflict, has little positive to say about Mr. Putin’s decision last week to start a war.

Images of significant anti-war protests across Russia have spread across the internet. Pictures on Monday showed long lines at banks as Russians looked to withdraw their savings amid fears of a major economic collapse.

The Russian government has been remarkably ineffective at suppressing such images during the conflict.

Even some key Russian oligarchs have publicly broken with the Kremlin and called for an end to the war. Such dissenting messages are the opposite of the unified Russian front Mr. Putin hoped to project.

“My parents are Ukrainian citizens and live in Lviv, my favorite city. But I have also spent much of my life as a citizen of Russia, building and growing businesses,” Russian billionaire Mikhail Fridman wrote in a letter Monday that was first reported by The Financial Times. “I am deeply attached to Ukrainian and Russian peoples and see the current conflict as a tragedy for them both.”

With his army bogged down in Ukraine and facing growing accusations that he has committed war crimes, Mr. Putin could become more dangerous, specialists say. In fact, they say, the sharp anti-Russian turn in public opinion helped fuel Mr. Putin’s dangerous decision over the weekend to put his country’s nuclear forces on high alert.

“That is the sign he cares. That is the sign that this is getting under his skin,” Mr. Townsend said.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Ukraine war tests the power of tech giants
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/technology/ukraine-russia-social-media.html
GIST	<p>Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has become a defining geopolitical moment for some of the world’s biggest tech companies, as their platforms have turned into major battlefields for a parallel information war and their data and services have become vital links in the conflict.</p> <p>Over the last few days, Google, Meta, Twitter, Telegram and others have been forced to grapple with how to wield that power, caught between escalating demands by Ukrainian, Russian, European Union and U.S. officials.</p> <p>On Friday, Ukrainian leaders pleaded with Apple, Meta and Google to restrict their services inside Russia. Then Google and Meta, which owns Facebook, barred Russian state-run media from selling ads on their platforms. Sundar Pichai, Google’s chief executive, also spoke with top European Union officials over how to counter Russian disinformation.</p>

At the same time, Telegram, a widely used messaging app in Russia and Ukraine, threatened to shut down channels related to the war because of rampant misinformation. And on Monday, Twitter said it would label all posts containing links to Russian state-affiliated media outlets, and Meta said it would restrict access to some of those outlets across the European Union to ward off war propaganda.

For many of the companies, including [Facebook](#), Google, Twitter, the war is an opportunity to rehabilitate their reputations after facing questions in recent years over privacy, market dominance and how they spread toxic and divisive content. They have a chance to show they can use their technology for good in a way not seen since the [Arab Spring](#) in 2011, when social media connected activists and was cheered as an instrument for democracy.

But the tech companies face tricky decisions. Any missteps could be costly, adding more momentum to efforts in Europe and the United States to regulate their businesses or leading Russia to ban them altogether.

Executives inside the companies are making judgment calls about what to do, employees said. If Google, Meta, Twitter and others take some steps and not others, they might be accused of doing too little and looking halfhearted. But curbing too many services and information might also cut off ordinary Russians from the digital conversations that can counteract state-run propaganda.

“These companies want all the benefits of monopolizing the world’s communications with none of the responsibility of getting swept up in geopolitics and having to choose sides,” said Yael Eisenstat, a fellow at the Berggruen Institute, a Los Angeles think tank, who formerly led Facebook’s election integrity operations. In many ways, she said, tech companies are “in a no-win situation in the midst of an international crisis.”

Many of the companies have moved gingerly, said Marietje Schaake, a tech policy expert and former member of the European Parliament. While Google and Meta blocked Russian state media from selling ads on their sites last week, the companies did not bar the outlets, as many Western policymakers had urged.

As the conflict has ratcheted up, the companies have taken additional steps. On Sunday, Google’s Maps division stopped displaying traffic information inside Ukraine out of concerns that it could create safety risks by showing where people were gathering. Facebook announced that it had taken down a [pro-Kremlin influence campaign and a separate hacking campaign](#) targeting its users in Ukraine.

On Monday, Twitter began labeling all tweets containing links to Russian state-affiliated media outlets so users would be aware of the information sources. Since the conflict in Ukraine began, users have tweeted links to state-affiliated media about 45,000 times a day, the company said.

Ms. Schaake, now the international policy director at Stanford University’s Cyber Policy Center, said the measures were not enough. She said the companies must block Russian propaganda outlets and establish clearer policies about their beliefs in human rights and democracy that could be applied beyond Russia.

“The interventions under huge pressure also underline what has not been done for so long,” she said. Others warned that there would be negative consequences if the platforms were blocked in Russia. “It’s the most important place for public debate about what’s going on,” said Andrei Soldatov, a Russian journalist and censorship expert. “Nobody would take it as a good sign if Facebook blocked access for Russian citizens.”

Google did not immediately have a comment. Twitter said it took its role in the conflict seriously. Facebook declined to comment.

Telegram's experience illustrates the competing pressures. The app is popular in Russia and Ukraine for sharing images, videos and information about the war. But it has also become a gathering ground for war misinformation, such as unverified images from battlefields.

On Sunday, Pavel Durov, Telegram's founder, posted to his more than 600,000 followers on the platform that he was considering blocking some war-related channels inside Ukraine and Russia because they could aggravate the conflict and incite ethnic hatred.

Users responded with alarm, saying they relied on Telegram for independent information. Less than an hour later, Mr. Durov reversed course.

"Many users asked us not to consider disabling Telegram channels for the period of the conflict, since we are the only source of information for them," [he wrote](#). Telegram did not respond to a request for comment.

Inside Meta, which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp, the situation has been "chaotic" because of the volume of Russian disinformation on its apps, said two employees, who were not authorized to speak publicly. Russian experts on Meta's security team, which identifies and removes state-sponsored disinformation from Facebook and Instagram, have been working around the clock and communicating regularly with Twitter, YouTube and other companies about their findings, the two employees said.

Meta's security team has long debated whether to restrict Sputnik and Russia Today, two of Russia's largest state-run media sites, on its platforms or label their posts so they clearly state their source. Russia Today and Sputnik are "critical elements in Russia's disinformation and propaganda ecosystem," according to [a January report](#) from the State Department.

Meta executives had resisted the moves, saying they would anger Russia, the employees said. But after war broke out, Nick Clegg, who heads global affairs for Meta, [announced](#) on Monday that the company would restrict access to Russia Today and Sputnik across the European Union.

Tech companies now face two main types of war-related demands from governments.

Russia is pressuring them to increasingly censor social media posts and other information flows inside the country. Moscow has already heavily restricted access to Facebook and Twitter, with YouTube potentially next. On Monday, Russia demanded that Google block ads carried on its platform related to the war. That followed an order on Sunday to lift restrictions on pro-Kremlin media outlets related to Ukraine, without saying how it would enforce the order.

At the same time, Western officials are pushing the companies to block Russian state media and propaganda. On Monday, the leaders of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland wrote to Meta, Google, YouTube and Twitter to ask them to suspend pro-Kremlin and official government accounts, including Russia Today and Sputnik.

"The online platform providers and tech companies need to take a stand as authoritarian regimes seek to weaponize the openness of our societies to undermine peace and democracy," the [letter](#) said.

In France, Cédric O, the country's minister for digital policy, [met](#) on Monday with Susan Wojcicki, the head of YouTube. On a call a day earlier, Mr. Pichai, Google's chief executive, and Vera Jourova and Thierry Breton, two top E.U. policymakers, discussed countering Russian state-sponsored disinformation.

Ukraine's vice prime minister called on Meta, Apple, Netflix and Google on Friday to restrict access to their services inside Russia to isolate the country. "We need your support," his letter to YouTube said. American policymakers have also made requests to clamp down on Russian propaganda.

	“What strikes me is the power of the platforms is just so unequivocally recognized,” Ms. Schaake said. “I don’t ever recall seeing such a high-level political push for the companies to do more.”
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HEADLINE	02/28 Microsoft aids Ukraine; but quiet on Russia
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/microsoft-is-stopping-cyberattacks-against-ukraine-but-keeping-quiet-about-its-russian-business/
GIST	<p>Microsoft is working with Ukraine to counter cyberattacks, but the company is stopping short of detailing any changes to its business operations in Russia.</p> <p>With offices in both countries, Microsoft said Monday it is taking steps to protect its employees, support humanitarian aid, stop the spread of state-sponsored disinformation, and safeguard customers and countries from cyberattacks. The same day, Microsoft declined to answer questions on how — or if — it would make changes to its operations in Russia.</p> <p>“As we look to the future, it’s apparent that digital technology will play a vital role in war and peace alike,” Microsoft President Brad Smith said in a blog post. “Like so many others, we call for the restoration of peace, respect for Ukraine’s sovereignty and the protection of its people.”</p> <p>“We not only look toward but will work for a future where digital technology is used to protect countries and peoples, helping us all to bring out the best in each other.”</p> <p>On Monday, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee directed state agencies to cut ties with Russia, and recommended that companies doing business in the state do the same. BP and Shell, which operate sprawling oil refineries in northwest Washington, both announced they plan to cut ties with Russia.</p> <p>Microsoft has offices in both Kyiv and Moscow. Its Russian location serves customers in nine nearby countries. Russia was listed as a “source of raw material” for Microsoft devices’ supply chain in a 2020 report, alongside more than 90 other countries.</p> <p>Microsoft declined to comment multiple times on questions about potential changes to its operations in Russia.</p> <p>Also on Monday, Microsoft said it had detected a round of “offensive and destructive cyberattacks” against Ukraine’s digital infrastructure hours before the launch of missiles and movement of tanks Thursday.</p> <p>It identified a new malware package — dubbed FoxBlade — and was able to help detect and defend against it within three hours, Smith said in the blog post.</p> <p>Microsoft declined to say whether it had detected any additional cyber threats in the days following the FoxBlade attack against digital infrastructure in Ukraine or any similar threats in the U.S. but said Monday the “work is ongoing.”</p> <p>Cyberattacks against Ukrainian government websites and affiliated organizations have been working to disrupt operations in the country but, so far, Ukraine’s digital infrastructure appears to be holding up.</p> <p>Data-wiping malware infected hundreds of computers in Ukraine and neighboring Latvia and Lithuania, and a distributed-denial-of-service attack, which disrupts traffic to a server or network, temporarily knocked government websites offline last Wednesday.</p> <p>The attacks targeted the financial, defense, aviation and information technology industries.</p> <p>Microsoft said it remains especially concerned about attacks on “civilian digital targets,” including the financial, energy and agriculture sectors, emergency response services and humanitarian aid efforts. It also</p>

	<p>warned Ukrainian government agencies of efforts to steal government data sets and other records, like health, insurance and transportation-related personally identifiable information.</p> <p>“We will continue to share more detailed information publicly when we identify new malware that needs to be shared with the global security community,” Smith said.</p> <p>The company also said Monday it had activated its Microsoft Disaster Response Team to provide tech support and help humanitarian aid efforts. The Disaster Response Team, which has mobilized in the past to help following natural disasters like hurricanes Irma and Maria, offers information and communication technology expertise, partnership resources, and volunteer support.</p> <p>To prevent the spread of misinformation, Microsoft said it was “de-ranking” search results on Bing from RT and Sputnik, media outlets funded and directed by Russia. It will ban ads from both sites and remove the RT news app from its Windows app store, as well as preventing any state-sponsored content from displaying on its Microsoft Start platform, including MSN.com.</p> <p>YouTube and Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, made similar announcements to restrict access to RT and Sputnik. The European Union is also banning Kremlin-backed media outlets on online platforms, apps and broadcast channels.</p>
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	02/28 UN: Houthis terror group; arms embargo
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/28/yemen-United-Nations-Houthis-arms-embargo/1391646102510/
GIST	<p>Feb. 28 (UPI) -- The United Nations Security Council on Monday imposed an arms embargo on Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis as several ambassadors voiced concern over the possible consequences by characterizing the rebels as a terrorist group.</p> <p>The resolution seeks to limit the capacity of the Yemen-based Houthi rebels to conduct cross-border attacks in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia by expanding an arms embargo to the entire group.</p> <p>It also states the council "strongly" condemns the series of attacks by Houthis that struck civilians and civilian infrastructure in the two nations in the past several weeks while labeling it as a terrorist group for the first time.</p> <p>The resolution, proposed by the UAE, passed with 11 votes in favor with Brazil, Ireland, Mexico and Norway abstaining over its description of the Houthis as terrorists.</p> <p>Lana Nusseibeh, UAE's permanent representative to the U.N., applauded the council's passing of the resolution.</p> <p>"The resolution will curtail the military capabilities of the Houthis and push toward stopping their escalation in Yemen and the region," she said during the meeting. "It will also prevent their hostile activities against civilian vessels and threats to shipping lines and international trade.</p> <p>"The resolution will also stop the suffering of Yemeni civilians and those affected in neighboring countries by their terrorist acts."</p> <p>Since the war between the Saudi-led coalition forces and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels began in 2014, the country has spiraled into what the U.N. has called "the world's humanitarian crisis."</p>

According to a late January [U.N. country analysis](#) on Yemen, the war-torn country is facing severe food insecurity that borders on famine with about 24 million Yemenis, or 80% of the country's population, in need of humanitarian assistance, of which 14.4 million are in acute need.

The United States [designated](#) the Houthis rebels a terrorist organization in January of last year. A few days ago, it imposed a fresh round of Houthi-related sanctions in relation to a recent series of cross-border attacks on the UAE and Saudi Arabia that have killed [more than 650](#) civilians in January alone.

All country representatives voiced condemnation against the violence but several expressed dismay over its characterization of Houthis as terrorists for fear it could have unforeseen consequences.

Trine Heimerback, the deputy permanent representative for Norway to the U.N., [said](#) her country abstained from the vote as it is worried over the use of the terrorist designation that lacks a clear definition, which may negatively affect U.N. efforts to achieve a political solution.

The Houthis' inclusion also sets a precedence for other conflicts and present other legal ramifications as well as have unintended consequences affecting the U.N's efforts to address human needs throughout Yemen, she said.

"The draft resolution does acknowledge the need for all parties to engage toward a political solution, and includes language aimed at safeguarding humanitarian action and not exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation," she said. "However, it stops short of addressing our concerns."

The vote was held days after the Security Council [failed](#) to pass a resolution condemning Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.

Russia used its veto power to strike it down, but three countries abstained: China, India and the UAE.

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HEADLINE	03/01 Spain arrests 5 Pakistanis for terrorism
SOURCE	https://theprint.in/world/five-pakistanis-arrested-in-spain-on-terrorism-charges/852824/
GIST	<p>Madrid [Spain], March 1 (ANI): Giving body blow to the already settled radical Islam in the country, the National Police of Spain arrested five Pakistani citizens for encouraging their compatriots through social networks to assassinate those who raise their voice against them.</p> <p>Police arrested the Pakistani citizens on February 21 in Barcelona, Gerona, Ubeda (Jaen) and Granada, according to a media report.</p> <p>The detainees, all in their twenties, were sympathizers neither of the Islamic State (ISIS) nor of Al Qaeda, the groups to which practically all of those arrested in Spain are related, but of a radical Islamist group of Pakistan, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), with parliamentary representation and which advocates the implementation of Islamic law and execution of those who are branded as blasphemers, said the report.</p> <p>The judge of the National High Court Manuel Garcia-Castellon has ordered the admission to preventive detention of all of the accused on charges of collaboration with a terrorist organization, glorification and incitement to commit murders.</p> <p>The investigation that has led to these arrests began after the attack in September 2020 on the former Paris headquarters of Charlie Hebdo. The satirical magazine had already suffered a jihadist attack in January 2015 in which eight persons had died.</p> <p>In the second attack, in which two people were seriously injured, Zaheer Hassan Mahmoud, a 25-year-old Pakistani who assured that his intention was to attack the publication again for its decision to re-disseminate the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, was arrested. The French police investigation found links between Zaheer Hassan Mahmoud and the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, the media report said.</p>

According to the report, that arrest triggered the alert among Spanish anti-terrorist experts due to the fear of being faced with a new terrorist phenomenon, especially after learning that the detainee had maintained contacts with a compatriot based in Barcelona.

The investigations have revealed that those now detained used social networks, mainly profiles on Facebook and Tik-Tok, as an authentic propaganda device in Urdu (the language spoken in Pakistan) through which they disseminated audiovisual material, in part created by them, in which they praised the terrorist attacks that were being committed both in Europe and in Pakistan against those they considered blasphemous, said the report.

“They were very active and had numerous followers, and not only in Spain, but also in other European countries, such as France, Greece or Italy,” sources close to the investigation pointed out, according to the report.

It was the increasing reach of their radical messages that precipitated the arrests. The alleged leader of the group was arrested in Barcelona; another two, in Girona; one more, in Ubeda (Jaen); and the last, in Granada.

In the records of their homes, the Police have not located weapons or plans to commit a specific attack, but abundant jihadist material from the Islamic State in which threats against Europe and Israel were poured, according to the report.

“They considered the brothers Cherif and Said Kouachi [perpetrators of the attack against Charlie Hebdo] as heroes of Islam”, highlights the same sources.

The operation was carried out by the Barcelona Provincial Intelligence Unit and the General Information Police Station, the National Intelligence Center (CNI) and Europol, the EU agency for police collaboration. (ANI)

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HEADLINE	03/01 Philippine army attacks militant camp
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/3-killed-philippine-army-attack-124016018.html
GIST	<p>CAGAYAN DE ORO, Philippines (AP) — Philippine troops backed by fighter jets attacked a remote camp of Muslim militants linked to the Islamic State group on Tuesday in a predawn assault in the country’s south that left two insurgents and a soldier dead, military officials said.</p> <p>Two soldiers were wounded in the assault on the camp of about 50 Dawlah Islamiya group fighters near the town of Maguing in Lanao del Sur province. Air force fighter jets dropped a dozen bombs as army troops launched a ground attack, said regional military commander Lt. Gen. Alfredo Rosario Jr.</p> <p>The gunmen fled after the airstrikes and were being pursued, Rosario and other military officials said. The assault was staged far from rural communities to prevent civilians from being caught in the crossfire, they said.</p> <p>Military officials said troops were continuing to clash sporadically with fleeing militants led by a militant commander they identified as Abu Zacharia.</p> <p>Members of Dawlah Islamiya were involved in a 2017 siege of southern Marawi city, where hundreds of militants waving Islamic State group-style black flags occupied commercial buildings and villages and took hostages. Filipino troops, backed by U.S. and Australian surveillance aircraft, quelled the five-month siege, which left about 1,200 people dead, mostly militants.</p> <p>The military has been launching offensives against small armed groups allied with the militants who laid siege on Marawi, including the Abu Sayyaf, which has been blacklisted by the U.S. and the Philippines for past bombings, ransom kidnappings and beheadings.</p>

HEADLINE	02/28 Taliban halts further evacuations
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-halts-further-evacuations-rejecting-u-s-precondition-for-lifting-sanctions-11646077567?mod=hp_lead_pos11
GIST	<p>The Taliban said Sunday that Afghans will no longer be allowed to leave the country without a good reason, and women will be barred from traveling without a chaperone, rejecting a key U.S. demand before the lifting of sanctions and the recognition of its government.</p> <p>Since the Taliban seized power last summer, thousands of Afghans have continued to try to flee Afghanistan fearing reprisal for their past affiliation with the U.S. and to escape a sharp economic downturn that has left millions on the brink of starvation. The Taliban didn't outline what reasons it would approve for leaving the country.</p> <p>The Taliban said the restrictions on travel were being imposed for the benefit of its citizens and that Afghan families abroad were languishing in camps in places like Turkey and Qatar, suffering from diseases and without any clear path for the future.</p> <p>"The government is obliged to find out a way to protect their people," Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said at a news conference on Sunday. "Especially when their path is not clear and they're not invited. They should not dive into the unknown." He said religious law prohibited women from traveling without a chaperone—dashing hopes of some that they could leave Afghanistan soon.</p> <p>"We haven't had a life here for the past six months. I am so stressed out," said an Afghan woman and former human rights worker hoping to be evacuated, along with her family, to Germany in the coming weeks. "When I heard the news I was in shock. I thought: Oh no, I am stuck here. But I'm still hopeful I will find a way to get out of Afghanistan."</p> <p>Thousands of Afghans who were evacuated on U.S. military and private charter flights last summer remain stalled in third countries around the world as their paperwork is processed, and some may end up with nowhere to go.</p> <p>In the United Arab Emirates, where one of the largest clusters of some 10,000 Afghans have been living, refugees in early February held protests against what they said were prisonlike conditions and the slow pace of U.S. processing.</p> <p>The State Department said the U.S. was engaged with the Taliban to resolve issues and had not officially heard the communication about barring further departures from them.</p> <p>Earlier in February, spokesman Ned Price said the U.S. was working to help find places that will accept Afghans now living in third countries. He also said the U.S. was pressing the Taliban to live up to commitments to respect human rights including the freedom of travel.</p> <p>Since the summer, Qatar has operated evacuation flights for the U.S. and others to allow a trickle of U.S. citizens, residents and Afghan visa holders to leave the country. The last evacuation flight took off about a month ago.</p> <p>"Our ability to facilitate relocation for our Afghan allies depends on the Taliban living up to its commitment of free passage. We have repeatedly reiterated this point to them," the State Department said in a statement Monday.</p> <p>The Taliban spokesman rejected suggestions that the group had promised the U.S. to allow more Afghans to continue to leave the country.</p> <p>"We said that we would allow the Americans, when they were stationed in the airport [in August], to take those whom they're concerned about. But this was not a continued promise," Mr. Mujahid said.</p>

On Monday, the Taliban appeared to be working to stop Afghans trying to flee by road. On the main highway that leads from Kabul to Pakistan, Taliban fighters stopped all cars at several checkpoints. Families with suitcases were sometimes pulled aside.

One Taliban fighter asked a driver: “Why are you going to Pakistan? You shouldn’t go to Pakistan. You should stay here and help build your country.” The driver responded he wasn’t heading to Pakistan and was allowed to go.

Last year, senior State Department officials said more than [60,000 Afghan interpreters and other visa applicants](#) were left behind after the [chaotic evacuation effort](#) that took place last summer. The [Special Immigrant Visa program](#) was set up in 2009 to help Afghan allies at risk of reprisal for helping the U.S. and its allies.

The figure includes 33,000 Afghan principal applicants and their families in the later stage of the process, who have cleared most of the vetting. In addition, some 27,000 Afghans are in the earlier stages of the process, and their family members aren’t included in the figure, meaning the true number of people that may be eligible to be evacuated is several times higher.

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HEADLINE	02/28 Stranded Afghans feel betrayed by US
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/28/stranded-us-afghan-allies-wonder-if-helping-was-mi/
GIST	<p>The past six months have been rough for Will, a 43-year-old Afghan who worked for two years as an interpreter for the U.S. military.</p> <p>He is struggling for food and income and has moved from the Logar province into Kabul — close to the airport where, he hopes, he will one day be spirited out by the Americans.</p> <p>He has heard nothing from the State Department.</p> <p>“I am not safe here,” he told The Washington Times by email. “Did I make mistake to work with U.S. Army as interpreter?”</p> <p>“Why [is the U.S.] punishing me like this?” said Will, whose real name is being withheld for his safety.</p> <p>It has been six months since the end of the airlift that brought 76,000 Afghan evacuees to the U.S. All have been processed and released into America despite questions about who made it out and whether they had been fully vetted.</p> <p>Experts say tens of thousands of other Afghans who should have been evacuated were instead stranded. Many are like Will, who directly assisted the U.S. government and were promised a ticket out of the country under the Special Immigrant Visa program.</p> <p>They are now struggling through an Afghanistan winter, many unable to find jobs or get enough food to eat, as they wait to hear from the State Department about their chances for rescue.</p> <p>“This could turn out to be the worst man-made humanitarian crisis we have ever seen,” said one person involved with evacuation efforts.</p> <p>Will is stuck in a bureaucratic nightmare trying to convince the State Department that he has submitted all the documents.</p> <p>Another man whom The Times is calling Muhammad is awaiting his interview, but the U.S. no longer has staff in Afghanistan to conduct interviews. A third man had his special visa in hand but was unable to get through the crush of people outside the Kabul airport in August.</p>

President Biden, defending his withdrawal schedule in July, promised them something better.

“Our message to those women and men is clear: There is a home for you in the United States if you so choose, and we will stand with you just as you stood with us,” Mr. Biden said.

‘Hopeless’

In the face of State Department impotence, private groups have stepped in to provide food, winter clothes, rent money or a place to stay. The goal is to keep Afghan allies alive long enough for the State Department to figure out a solution.

Perry Blackburn, a retired Army officer and founder of AFGFree.org, estimates that aid organizations are helping sustain 5,000 to 8,000 Afghans. Private donations support them.

“Most of it is literally grassroots donations,” Mr. Blackburn said. “People from social media, regular folks, will donate \$20. And it makes a difference. We can get a bunch of \$20 bills and feed people with it.”

The State Department says it doesn’t have a firm estimate on how many Afghans who qualify for the special visa are still in the country, nor how many have made it across the border and are navigating the process from relative safety elsewhere.

When family members are included, the number could be as high as 100,000, said some veterans involved in the evacuation effort.

In response to questions, the State Department said it is still trying to get people out of Afghanistan, though the special immigrant applicants are not at the top of the list.

The top priority right now remains U.S. citizens, followed by Afghans who hold legal permanent resident status in the U.S. and then relatives of people in those categories, the department told The Times.

Then come the special visa applicants.

“As capacity and operational conditions allow, we intend to help relocate those who are farthest along in the SIV process after they have received chief-of-mission (COM) approval,” the department said.

Among those stranded by the government’s inadequacies is an Afghan man who spent 12 years supporting the U.S. effort as an interpreter. He has siblings who are U.S. citizens and even a relative serving in the U.S. Army. He had cleared nearly all of the hurdles and was just awaiting an interview.

Now he and his family are stuck. The State Department told him to get to another country, but he is unable to leave Afghanistan without a visa in hand.

“You have to get an interview, but there’s no place to interview,” Mr. Blackburn said. “It’s the same conundrum as with everything else with State. There’s a way to fix that problem. They can do [the interview] over Zoom or any other video conferencing, and then they can finish it up once they get people out if they need to.”

His organization is trying to help people reach Pakistan, but that is effective only for people waiting just for the interview. Those who need to clear other hurdles could be waiting for months, without any way to support themselves, while the U.S. government goes through all the steps.

That’s the case for Will, who served at Camp Shouz as a go-between for U.S. troops and contractors as they negotiated with village elders and worked to train Afghan police recruits.

The Washington Times has seen his package of documents and communications with the U.S. government. Among them is a glowing recommendation from a U.S. Army major who called Will “one of my most trusted interpreters.”

Yet the State Department said it needed more proof of Will’s time in office. The major wrote a follow-up email on behalf of Will, but that didn’t move the application forward. Will said the last communication he received from the State Department was in August.

The man The Times identifies as Muhammad worked on U.S. efforts to promote women’s education. The nature of that work in a country like Afghanistan meant death threats, according to the visa recommendation letter that his American supervisor wrote. Police even warned him at one point that he was the target of a plot to plant explosives on his car.

U.S. officials have ruled that Muhammad should qualify for the special visa. He is awaiting the interview, the last big hurdle before the visa is issued.

The problem is that nobody is there to interview him with the U.S. Embassy shut down.

The State Department’s advice to people like Muhammad is to get out of Afghanistan and have an interview at a U.S. embassy in another country.

That’s a lot easier said than done. Muhammad said some of his visa-eligible friends have made it across the border with Pakistan, but he doesn’t have the money to make the trip.

“I am hopeless now,” he told The Times.

Other Afghans offered similar stories of danger, desperation — and a sense of betrayal.

“We are in high level of danger from the Taliban,” said one.

Yet another man stuck in a back-and-forth with the U.S. government over documents said, “We are threatened with death and you are not helping us.”

Will said he doesn’t consider getting across the border as a viable option. “Pakistan is birthplace of Taliban How can I go there?” he said.

Making the trip isn’t as easy as it might sound to Americans.

“Going to Pakistan is not like [the] border between Canada and United States to pass free,” Will said.

He said he wants the U.S. to evacuate those who were “really” allies, “not people hanging on the plane.”

That was a reference to last summer’s chaotic airlift, Operation Allies Refuge, which was billed as a crash effort to evacuate those who helped the U.S. military at significant risk to themselves.

Instead, the majority of the 76,000 evacuees transported from Afghanistan to U.S. migrant camps are not likely eligible for the special visa, officials have acknowledged.

Experts said the rescue was more a factor of making it to the airport. Having assisted the U.S. turned out not to be a requirement for boarding a plane.

“Essentially, we evacuated Kabul’s middle class,” said one veteran involved in helping the authentic allies.

He said the proof is in resettlement struggles in the U.S. It has been tougher than anticipated because the evacuees weren’t the people the government was expecting.

“Since they weren’t the folks that worked for us, they don’t understand the culture, they largely don’t speak the language,” the expert said. “The fact that we didn’t get the right folks is creating a [expletive] from start to finish.”

‘They need to survive’

Authentic allies applying for the special visa must clear a 14-step process. The first five steps, known as COM, or Chief of Mission, approval, are where the Afghan proves service with American troops and danger for having done so. Employment records and letters of recommendation from a supervising officer are required as evidence.

According to the latest State Department data covering last summer, it took more than 300 days to earn COM approval — and that was a huge improvement. In the spring, it took nearly 600 days.

Once COM approval is in hand, applicants must apply to the Department of Homeland Security’s citizenship agency with a new set of forms. The department takes about 24 days to rule on those petitions and returns approvals to the State Department, which then asks for yet another set of documents.

It takes nearly 50 more days for the State Department to process the file and set up an in-person interview. After another six weeks of “administrative processing,” the applicant is supposed to undergo a medical exam and then go get the visa stamp permitting entry into the U.S.

From start to finish, the U.S. government takes an average of about 435 days to process an application — not including the time the Afghan needs to collect documents and fill out forms for three separate submissions, get the medical exam and make it to the embassy for the visa.

That means those in line for a visa in August, the last time the government had an embassy open in Afghanistan, likely applied in the spring of 2020, soon after President Trump announced his deal to withdraw American troops from the country in 2021.

The State Department admits having canceled interviews scheduled for September for 451 Afghans. Those were for people who had cleared the COM step, meaning they were authentic allies. The department said it is unable to disclose the status of those applicants.

It’s possible some got out of the country, either in the airlift or by making their way to Pakistan. Still, The Times is aware of some who are stuck and begging the State Department for advice.

They say they have heard nothing since August.

Perhaps the most troubling cases are Afghans who turned over their passports to the embassy for processing last summer. When the State Department evacuated, the passports were destroyed as part of the standard protocol for cleansing all documents.

The embassy was shut down and documents were wiped while the Biden administration was telling Americans that the Taliban were cooperating.

Mr. Blackburn said it’s tough to square the government’s stances.

“If the environment was safe, there was no need to destroy anything and evacuate the embassy, according to their own narratives. But they did,” he said.

He said it will take years for the State Department to dig out of the hole.

Some Afghans might not have that time.

“They need to survive between now and then,” said one person working the evacuation issue.

If the U.S. government won't act out of magnanimity or obligation, he said, it should act out of self-interest.

Some of the SIV applicants spent years learning the American military's inner workings and capabilities — the kind of information that might be of interest to U.S. adversaries.

Mr. Blackburn said the average special visa applicant is living "in a very rudimentary kind of way" with limited options for food and work. Some, however, face acute dangers from segments of the Taliban seeking them or their families.

"This is what our Afghan partners are telling us on the ground," Mr. Blackburn said. "We know for a fact some people have been detained, and again it goes to these bad, rogue sections of the Taliban that are looking to ransom people."

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	03/01 Climate change early impact South America
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/climate-science-caribbean-forests-environment-and-nature-fdb886a31959ad3b30c57bc677a2a8be
GIST	<p>RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Scientists have long been warning that extreme weather would cause calamity in the future. But in South America — which in just the last month has had deadly landslides in Brazil, wildfire in Argentine wetlands and flooding in the Amazon so severe it ruined harvests — that future is already here.</p> <p>In just three hours on Feb. 15, the city of Petropolis, nestled in the forested mountains above Rio de Janeiro, received over 10 inches of rainfall — more than ever registered in a single day since authorities began keeping records in 1932. The ensuing landslides swallowed the lives of more than 200 people, and left nearly 1,000 homeless.</p> <p>A report published Monday by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) corroborates what many on the ground are witnessing with their own eyes. Global warming is altering the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as El Nino and La Nina, the natural heating and cooling of parts of the Pacific that alters weather patterns around the globe. These events have also become more difficult to predict, causing additional damage, the report said.</p> <p>"Climate change is projected to convert existing risks in the region into severe key risks," the report said.</p> <p>Until 2020, there was plenty of water, swamps, stagnant lakes and lagoons in Argentina's Ibera Wetlands, one of the largest such ecosystems in the world. But an historic drought of the Parana River dried much of it out; its waters are in the lowest level since 1944. Since January it has been the stage of raging fires.</p> <p>And this week, 70% of the remote city of Jordao in Brazil's Amazon rainforest was submerged by the overflow of two rivers. It has shattered the lives of thousands of people in the region, including in 32 Indigenous communities.</p> <p>Central and South America is the second most urbanized region in the world after North America with 81% percent of its population residing within cities. In this context, forests are playing a vital role to stabilize local climates and to help the world meet the ambitious temperature goals set by the 2015 Paris Agreement, experts say.</p>

The entire Amazon rainforest stores between 150 and 200 billion tonnes of carbon in the vegetation and soil, according to Carlos Nobre, a prominent Brazilian climate scientist who has studied the biome for several decades.

“It’s a huge reservoir,” Nobre told The Associated Press in a phone interview. “If you lose the forest, this carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas, goes into the atmosphere. It is very important to maintain the forest.”

But most governments across the region have failed to heed the IPCC’s warnings and stop the destruction. Many South American leaders have remained silent about illegal logging and mining activities in sensitive regions. Brazil’s President Jair Bolsonaro has gone further, outright encouraging it both with his words and by weakening environmental agencies and regulation.

Even in Colombia, where President Iván Duque has attempted to rein in illegal logging, a recent increase in forest fires led more than 150 international academics and activists last week to send a letter urging the government to take a more aggressive stance.

Indeed, local prosecutors and police have said the region is more and more dependent on activists for preservation, either to prevent deforestation that leads to drastic changes in climate or to deal with the consequences of environmental degradation.

Alejandra Boloqui, 54, manages a private natural reserve in Argentina’s Ibera Wetlands, and has been helping firefighters wage their desperate fight against the flames. Last week, she recorded a scene on her phone that overwhelmed her with sadness: a dozen alligators fleeing the flames and walking down a dirt track in search of water.

“When I started filming them, I cried. I felt they were saying to me: ‘I’ve been left without a home, I’m leaving,’” Boloqui told the AP. “It got my attention seeing so many alligators moving together during the day. ... They are very slow reptiles who move at night to avoid heat.”

They, along with many other animals, found temporary refuge in a nearby lagoon that had dried up due to lack of rain and has since been artificially refilled with solar water pumps.

Local authorities attributed the fires to the burning of pastures for cattle ranching, which has been prohibited since December. IPCC experts stress in the report that droughts lay the groundwork for blazes that spread rapidly.

Brazil’s south and southeast regions last year faced their worst droughts in nine decades, raising the specter of possible power rationing given the grid’s dependence on hydroelectric plants. Simultaneously, in Manaus, the largest city in the Amazon, rivers swelled to levels unseen in over a century of record-keeping, flooding streets and houses and affecting some 450,000 people in the region.

This week, with most of Amazonian city Jordao plunged underwater, Indigenous leader and forest guard Josias Kaxinawá is working to bring any support he can to dozens of communities. He spent all day Wednesday rescuing people and their belongings using his small boat equipped with an outboard motor.

The Jordao and Tarauaca rivers join during the rainy season, which Kaxinawá and his neighbors didn’t expect for several more weeks. But this time, unlike last year, showers arrived not just too early, but also brutally, he told the AP.

“We are living our worst moment. Flood, rains, winds. Climate change is creating more problems for us. We are losing a lot of stuff, boats, household appliances, every crop we grew last year,” Kaxinawá said by phone from Jordao, adding he had never had seen so much rain in his area. “We worry about the future,” he said.

He added that the small city’s agricultural production is “virtually all destroyed.”

	<p>This jibes with the IPCC report, which says changes in the timing and magnitude of precipitation along with extreme temperatures are impacting agricultural production across Central and South America.</p> <p>“Impacts on rural livelihoods and food security, particularly for small and medium-sized farmers and Indigenous Peoples in the mountains, are projected to worsen,” the report read.</p> <p>Acre state’s government said at least 76 families have lost their homes in Jordao and around, most of them Indigenous and now living in a local shelter. But Mayor Naudo Ribeiro admitted the count was underestimated.</p> <p>“This was too fast, there’s no way to prepare when it happens like this,” Ribeiro told local media.</p> <p>More than 3,400 kilometers (2,100 miles) away in Petropolis, the Brazilian city ravaged by landslides last week, Mayor Rubens Bomtempo provided journalists with a similar comment just days before.</p> <p>“This was totally unpredictable,” Bomtempo said. “No one could predict rain as hard as this.”</p> <p>The IPCC report suggests events like these will continue to shake the region.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Climate panel warns: time running out
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/climate/climate-change-ipcc-un-report.html
GIST	<p>The dangers of climate change are mounting so rapidly that they could soon overwhelm the ability of both nature and humanity to adapt, creating a harrowing future in which floods, fires and famine displace millions, species disappear and the planet is irreversibly damaged, a major new scientific report has concluded.</p> <p>The report released Monday by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a body of experts convened by the United Nations, is the most detailed look yet at the threats posed by global warming. It concludes that nations aren’t doing nearly enough to protect cities, farms and coastlines from the hazards that climate change has already unleashed, such as record droughts and rising seas, let alone from the even greater disasters in store as the planet keeps heating up.</p> <p>Written by 270 researchers from 67 countries, the report is “an atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate leadership,” said António Guterres, the United Nations secretary general.</p> <p>“With fact upon fact, this report reveals how people and the planet are getting clobbered by climate change.”</p> <p>In the coming decades, as global temperatures continue to rise, hundreds of millions of people could struggle against floods, deadly heat waves and water scarcity from severe drought, the report said. Mosquitoes carrying diseases like dengue and malaria will spread to new parts of the globe. Crop failures could become more widespread, putting families in places like Africa and Asia at far greater risk of hunger and malnutrition. People unable to adapt to the enormous environmental shifts will end up suffering unavoidable loss or fleeing their homes, creating dislocation on a global scale, the authors said.</p> <p>To avert the most catastrophic impacts, nations need to quickly and sharply reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases that are dangerously heating the planet, the report said.</p> <p>Even so, the world’s poorest nations are increasingly struggling with climate shocks and will likely require hundreds of billions of dollars per year in financial support over the next few decades to protect themselves — support that wealthier nations have so far been slow to provide.</p>

“This report is terrifying; there is no other way of saying it,” said Simon Stiell, the environment minister of the Caribbean nation of Grenada. “We need to see enhanced action and increased climate finance provision for adaptation. The scale of this crisis requires nothing less.”

Global temperatures have already increased by an average of 1.1 degrees Celsius, or 2 degrees Fahrenheit, since the 19th century, as humans have pumped heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere by burning coal, oil and gas for energy, and cutting down forests.

Many leaders, including President Biden, have vowed to limit total global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius compared with preindustrial levels. That’s the threshold beyond which scientists say the likelihood of catastrophic climate impacts increases significantly.

But achieving that goal would require nations to all but eliminate their fossil-fuel emissions by 2050, and most are far off-track. The world is currently on pace to warm somewhere between 2 degrees and 3 degrees Celsius this century, experts have estimated.

If average warming passes 1.5 degrees Celsius, even humanity’s best efforts to adapt could falter, the report warns. The cost of defending coastal communities against rising seas could exceed what many nations can afford. In some regions, including parts of North America, livestock and outdoor workers could face rising levels of heat stress that make farming increasingly difficult.

“Beyond 1.5, we’re not going to manage on a lot of fronts,” said Maarten van Aalst, the director of the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Center and an author of the report. “If we don’t implement changes now in terms of how we deal with physical infrastructure, but also how we organize our societies, it’s going to be bad.”

Poor nations are far more exposed to climate risks than rich countries. Between 2010 and 2020, droughts, floods and storms killed 15 times as many people in highly vulnerable countries, including those in Africa and Asia, as in the wealthiest countries, the report said.

That disparity has fueled a contentious debate: what the industrialized nations most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions owe developing countries. Low-income nations want financial help, both to defend against future threats and to compensate for damages they can’t avoid. The issue will be a focus when governments meet for the next United Nations climate summit in Egypt in November.

In northern Kenya, where drought has been ravaging crops and pastures, “people are still dying by the day,” said Fatuma Hussein, a program manager with Power Shift Africa, a think tank. “They are not even able to provide food for their animals or themselves.”

Some herders are moving their livestock to wetter regions, Ms. Hussein said. But vulnerable countries will not manage without support from rich nations, she said.

In Central America, climate adaptation measures that are effective today may no longer be feasible in the years ahead, said Debora Ley, an energy specialist based in Guatemala who contributed to the report. Between rising seas, droughts, and mudslides worsened by deforestation, Dr. Ley worries that some communities in the region may face collapse. “You can live somewhere, but if you’re prone to floods for six months out of 12 in a year, then can you really consider that habitable?” she said.

The report, which was approved by 195 governments, makes clear that risks to humans and nature accelerate with every additional fraction of a degree of warming.

If global warming reaches 1.5 degrees Celsius, up to 8 percent of the world’s farmland could become unsuitable for growing food by the end of the century, the authors wrote. Coral reefs, which buffer coastlines against storms, will face more frequent bleaching from ocean heat waves and decline by 70 to 90 percent. The number of people around the world exposed to severe coastal flooding could increase by more than one-fifth without new protections.

At 2 degrees Celsius of warming, the amount of land [globally burned by wildfires](#) is expected to rise by more than one-third. Between 800 million and 3 billion people globally could face chronic [water scarcity](#) because of drought, including more than one-third of the population in southern Europe. Crop yields and fish harvests in many places could start declining.

At 3 degrees of warming, the risk of extreme weather events could increase fivefold by century's end. Flooding from sea level rise and heavier rainstorms could cause four times as much economic damage worldwide as they do today. As many as 29 percent of known plant and animal species on land could face a high risk of extinction.

To date, many nations have been able to partly limit the damage by spending billions of dollars each year on adaptation measures like flood barriers, air-conditioning or early-warning systems for tropical cyclones.

Over the past half-century, the number of deaths worldwide from storms, floods and other extreme weather events [has fallen by more than half](#) because of improved early warning systems and disaster management, the World Meteorological Organization has found. Investments in public health have meant fewer people are succumbing to diseases like cholera, even as rising temperatures and heavier rainfall have facilitated their spread.

But those efforts are too often “incremental,” the report said. Preparing for future threats, like dwindling freshwater supplies or irreversible ecosystem damage, will require “transformational” changes that involve rethinking how people build homes, grow food, produce energy and protect nature.

Some of the planet's most vulnerable nations have been digging deep into their coffers to cope with climate threats. Ethiopia aims to spend \$6 billion a year on a range of adaptation measures, which amounts to 5.6 percent of its annual economic output, according to government information [compiled by Power Shift Africa](#). South Sudan, one of the world's poorest countries, is preparing to spend \$376 million a year until 2030 to address climate-fueled flooding.

A decade ago, wealthy nations pledged to deliver \$100 billion per year to the developing world by 2020 to shift to cleaner sources of energy and adapt to climate change. But [they have fallen short by tens of billions of dollars](#), with only a fraction of the funds spent on adaptation.

John Kerry, President Biden's special envoy for climate change, acknowledged in an interview Monday that wealthy, heavily polluting nations were not doing enough.

“Every country needs to do more in terms of mitigation and they need to do more in terms of addressing both adaptation and resilience, no question about it,” he said.

At the same time, many communities are still acting in ways that increase their vulnerability, the report said. One reason flood risk is growing along the coasts, for instance, is that millions of people are moving to low-lying areas that are endangered by sea level rise. And some adaptation measures have unintended consequences. For example, sea walls protect certain places but [can also redirect flooding](#) into populated areas elsewhere. Irrigation can help protect crops against drought but can also deplete groundwater resources.

Instead, the report recommends that leaders pursue more farsighted strategies. As oceans rise, coastal communities could relocate inland while discouraging additional development along vulnerable shorelines. Improvements in basic services like health, roads, electricity and water could help make poor and rural communities more resilient against climate shocks.

“If we act now, we have a lot of choices,” said Edward R. Carr, a professor of international development at Clark University and an author of the report. “Ten years from now, hell of a lot of less. Thirty years from now, I don't know.” He added, “We'll always have choices. But they'll be less good choices, and they'll be much harder choices to make.”

HEADLINE	02/28 Snow season northern region disappearing
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/methow-valley-wildfires-climate-change/281-3f5b94c2-dbbe-48bf-96ba-4c87867d74b2
GIST	<p>METHOW, Wash. — If the environment is the spine for the Methow Valley, it almost had its back broken in the past year. While it is still standing, the threat has made residents here start to think about an uncomfortable truth.</p> <p>"Do you believe in climate change? I said, 'I don't have to believe, it's here. I know it's here. I've got the evidence, belief has nothing to do with it,'" said an adamant Alan Fahnestock on a recent February day while he stood outside a Mazama fire station. "Climate change is clearly a huge issue."</p> <p>Fahnestock is a long-time Methow Valley resident and volunteer firefighter who watched as the Cedar Creek and Cub Creek fires combined to burn more than 125,000 acres in the summer of 2021. It's more square mileage than Seattle and Tacoma combined. The fire lapped up at the Freestone Inn nearby and perilously close to the Sun Mountain Lodge as well, two year-round destinations.</p> <p>But it also damaged the lifeblood of this region's winter tourism season, the cross country ski trails. The Methow Trails is the largest Nordic system in America. It's a pristine, groomed, outdoor wonderland that has been the training grounds for dozens of elite athletes and novices as well.</p> <p>The summer made this place where people chase their chance for Olympic rings looks more like a scene from "The Lord of the Rings." National news outlets compared the air quality to Mordor because the sky was so black and the air stagnant. Trees that lined the trails burned and yet others near the Chickadee trailhead were wiped out.</p> <p>"The urgency is a lot more when fire touches half your network. It's real. It's here. It's consistent each year. It's a consistent presence in our community," says Methow Trails Executive Director James DeSalvo. "It's not just the lack of snow, it's more extreme summers." DeSalvo calls the trails-related tourism the "cog and hub to not just recreation here, but also the economy and helps how people can benefit and survive here." He said it accounts for close to \$8 million annually in the valley of roughly 2,000 full-time residents. He has already begun working with the forest service to try and figure out whether trails can be rerouted to higher elevations.</p> <p>Over at the Loup Loup Ski Bowl, which has been around since 1958, this snow season has been nothing short of horrific. The Bowl, fifteen minutes outside Twisp, advertises it gets 150" of snow a year. This season, there has only been one-third of that, according to their official register. "I cannot remember a February this warm," admitted Executive Director Brent Nourse, who stood near an open grassy patch at the bottom of the bowl.</p> <p>"It's coming into stark focus now," he said. "I think in order for us, as an organization to continue, we definitely need to expand and make sure that we're offering activities and experiences all year round. So, we are working with some other organizations to expand the mountain biking opportunities here."</p> <p>Those long-range plans are in development right now, he says, which would create an all-seasons configuration of the Bowl for the first time in history.</p> <p>But that's the reality of the situation, he said. The conditions have changed.</p> <p>It may be the biggest fight for survival here since the late 1970s when residents helped block the development of a major downhill ski resort near Mazama, citing the environmental impacts. Instead, it turned into a Nordic paradise butted up against the annual closure of Highway 20 to the north.</p>

	<p>Fahnestock said he also believes there will be a lack of water to go around if the summer fires continue to be as severe. That's why he's posting signs and publicly pushed for \$100,000 to activate a well near Mazama so firefighters don't have to travel into Winthrop to reload water during a crisis.</p> <p>Right now, Fahnestock said he's met about half that goal but wants to get it done by May before the next wildfire season as the landscape continues to warm up. He said, "It's very clearly changing."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Girl Scout cookies in short supply
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/cookie-mergency-girl-scout-goodies-are-in-short-supply/
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES — Chocolate milk in Maine. Cream cheese in New York City. Granite for headstones in Mississippi.</p> <p>And now, Girl Scout cookies in big swaths of Southern California.</p> <p>Nothing, it seems, is safe from pandemic-fueled supply chain problems. Even those smiling, sashed salesgirls have been forced to scramble this winter for supplies to peddle online or on folding tables in front of grocery stores.</p> <p>Deep in cookie-selling season, when Girl Scouts raise critical funds to pay for the year's activities, Samoas and S'mores are hard to find. And that's a blow for Scouts in greater Los Angeles because troops can receive up to \$1 for every box their members sell.</p> <p>On the plus side, there seems to be no shortage of No. 1-selling Thin Mints — at least not yet. You can still find Trefoil shortbreads and peanut butter Tagalongs.</p> <p>But coconut-, caramel- and chocolate-striped Samoas (known in some regions as Caramel deLites, the second-most popular cookie in the Scouts' lineup) are another story entirely. And so are S'mores, a relatively new offering with non-GMO ingredients.</p> <p>"Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles (GSGLA) has been informed by Little Brownie Bakers (LBB), our cookie baker, that supply chain and labor shortage issues are affecting their ability to deliver the cookies we've ordered," GSGLA said in a statement to The Times. "We are working hard with LBB to resolve this situation."</p> <p>Kentucky-based Little Brownie Bakers offered a terse written statement: "We are working diligently to fulfill orders and get cookies into the hands of hard-working Girl Scouts. We appreciate our cookie fans' support of Girl Scouting and their patience this season."</p> <p>These Girl Scouts could sure use a few more boxes.</p> <p>Victoria, 10, Alyssa, 11, and Valentina, 7, were selling cookies in front of a Granada Hills grocery store on a recent Friday night, cheerily greeting customers and judiciously keeping tabs on each \$5 sale.</p> <p>The girls, whose parents requested that their last names not be used, had a small supply of Samoas and no S'mores.</p> <p>"It's still fun," Alyssa said. "It's not like we're all out of every single cookie."</p> <p>The girls said they looked forward to cookie selling every year — shortage or no.</p> <p>"Especially when you do it with friends," Alyssa said, putting her arms around Victoria and Valentina.</p>

The squeeze is being felt in San Diego, where troops extended the selling season by two weeks into late March. Cookie deliveries to the Girl Scouts of Orange County have been delayed amid transportation issues with that group's supplier, ABC Bakers.

And it is dire for the Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles, according to emails sent to troops this month.

In a Feb. 4 email, the GSGLA said Girl-Delivery — in which customers can order cookies online and have them hand delivered by a Scout — would shut off that day for S'mores. And so would Direct-Ship options.

Those options would remain open for Samoas until "our on-hand supply is depleted," the organization said. As of Feb. 27, Samoas were available via the Digital Cookie portal; customers must purchase at least four boxes and pay shipping costs.

"We have a supply of both in our cupboards and local warehouses now but do not know if or how soon this supply will be replenished," the organization wrote, adding that troops should be "sisters to all Girl Scouts" by not overstocking on those items.

GSGLA, which represents 32,000 Scouts across Los Angeles, Kern and San Bernardino counties, and the bakery are being tight-lipped about the extent of the shortages and other details, declining to answer questions about how many boxes of the treats will not be available and when supplies might be replenished.

They would not say whether the supply chain problems are on the front end — for example, that the bakeries cannot get important ingredients delivered and therefore cannot bake enough cookies. Or if they're on the back end — that cookies are sitting in warehouses and there's no way to get them to their destinations.

The Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles did not provide additional information outside of its statement citing ongoing negotiations with the bakery. Calls to the Girl Scouts' national office have not been returned.

Other regions of the country have seen their own cookie snafus. In January, NPR reported that the Washington, D.C., area has had a shortage of the Scouts' newest offering, a confection called Adventurefuls. The Girl Scouts' website describes the treat as "an indulgent brownie-inspired cookie with caramel-flavored crème and a hint of sea salt."

But the pain has not been spread evenly. The Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast, which has troops from Ventura County to Santa Cruz County, has not experienced similar shortages.

"Girl Scout cookies are currently produced by two licensed bakeries, one of which has reported production delays for a small percentage of cookies," the Central Coast organization said in a statement. "Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast is not affected by that shortage."

The Southern California shortage is an ironic twist for the Girl Scouts after the 2021 season, when the organization ended up with a massive cookie surplus.

Unable to sell through traditional booths at grocery stores, libraries and other locations because of the pandemic, many troops went digital-only. They ended up with an extra 15 million boxes of cookies, 12 million of which never left the warehouses.

For the girls, the current cookie shortage is affecting the lessons and skills cookie-selling is meant to instill, such as self-confidence and responsibility.

"The bigger thing for me and our girls is that they've tried to sell cookies and then they're not going to have cookies to fill their orders," said Rita Satuloff, mother of 12-year-old Scout Shayden. "They're

	<p>possibly going to have to contact people and say, ‘I’m sorry, you ordered these cookies, but I can’t get them to you.’</p> <p>“It makes it very awkward for our 12-year-old,” added Satuloff, who serves as Troop 71045’s accountant. The family lives in Venice.</p> <p>“What it’s going to do is ... shy her away from approaching people in the future,” said Mathew Satuloff, Shayden’s father. “We’ve taught them a lot of skill but not how to disappoint people.</p> <p>“Let’s save that for the adults,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Not adapt fast enough to climate change?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/world-including-wa-not-adapting-fast-enough-to-climate-change-u-n-report-warns/
GIST	<p>Climate change is becoming irreversible and the world, including Washington state, is not doing enough to stop it.</p> <p>That was one of many takeaways among local authors of a sobering report published Monday by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in which the world’s leading climate scientists provided the latest research on how ecosystems — both our own and those of other species — are being affected by warming temperatures, and how to mitigate and adapt to those changes.</p> <p>Humanity and the natural world are being pushed beyond their threshold for adaptation, experts say, and Washington state is no exception.</p> <p>“It’s just like the rest of the world,” said Kristie Ebi, one of the report’s lead authors and a professor of global environmental change and health at the University of Washington’s School of Public Health. “And we know that our ability as a state to manage these extreme events is not where it needs to be.”</p> <p>Mitigation and adaptation to human-induced or anthropogenic climate change are crucial in all efforts to reduce and eventually eliminate harmful emissions.</p> <p>Washington’s Legislature has pledged to reduce emissions 25% compared with 1990 levels by 2035, though the Department of Ecology urged states to aim for a reduction of 40% in the same time frame.</p> <p>The passing in 2021 of the Climate Commitment Act introduced a plan to reduce carbon pollution using, among other things, a cap-and-invest program to offset greenhouse gas emissions. The program takes effect on Jan. 1, 2023.</p> <p>The construction of more efficient buildings and the electrification of the transportation system are pillars of the state’s overarching campaign to counteract irreversible climate change.</p> <p>Washington state deserves “pretty high marks” on its efforts to mitigate climate change, but less so when it comes to adaptive measures, such as electrifying transportation or the establishment of an emission trade scheme, most of which are still in the planning or implementation stages in Washington, said Jeremy Hess, another lead author of the report as well as a professor of environmental and occupations health sciences in the UW School of Medicine, and director of the university’s Center for Health and the Global Environment.</p> <p>“It’s a hard thing to make all these transformative changes really quickly and make sure the changes don’t have unintended consequences that are harmful to vulnerable communities,” he said. “There’s a delicate balance.”</p>

Last year in June, a blistering “heat dome” triggered record-breaking temperatures in Washington, Oregon and parts of British Columbia. [Attributive scientific analyses](#) found it was [a “once in a millennium” event](#) made 150 times likelier by climate change.

In recent years [marine heat waves](#) triggering ecological imbalances along the Pacific coast have become more frequent, and coastal flooding in and around Puget Sound has drawn more concern from the scientific community amid [projections of accelerating sea level rise](#).

“Climate change impacts in North America have been occurring faster and will become more severe much sooner than we had previously thought,” Sherilee Harper, one of the report’s lead authors, said during a news briefing Sunday morning.

Thanks, in part, to severe weather events like heat waves, wildfires, flooding and droughts, Harper said North Americans are becoming increasingly aware of the devastating impacts of climate change, but misinformation is leading to uncertainty in public recognition, and to delays in much needed policies.

The new report represents the IPCC’s second installment of its sixth assessment report. The first installment by the first working group, which was published last August, focused on [the connection between human activity and global warming](#).

Regarding the first installment, IPCC Chair Hoesung Lee said Monday that it “showed unequivocally that human activities have warmed the planet at a rate not seen in the past 2,000 years.”

The latest installment, which delves into how humanity and the natural world are adapting to climate change, is “a dire warning about the consequences of inaction,” Lee said. “The stakes for our planet have never been higher.”

The impacts of environmental change on mental health gained unprecedented recognition in the second installment with a chapter devoted to the topic. Attributive science — which is used to measure the direct impact of specific severe weather events — also made significant headway thanks to improved data sets and better technology. And, for the first time ever according to lead authors, colonialism was referenced as a cause for environmental vulnerability in marginalized communities.

The 3,500-page document written by 270 researchers from 67 countries relays in bleak but comprehensive detail the extent to which warming is affecting the planet today, and how the situation will almost surely worsen in the near future.

Greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced 45% by 2030 and eliminated completely by 2050 compared with preindustrial levels to prevent average global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, according to the Paris Agreement, an international treaty signed by 196 parties in 2015 that took effect in November 2016.

A temperature increase of that magnitude, scientists say, could cause several natural systems to reach a “tipping point” and trigger the deterioration of the planet’s most crucial ecosystems.

And yet, not only have average global temperatures already risen 1.09 degrees Celsius according to lead authors of the new report, global emissions are set to increase almost 14% by the end of the decade and only 20 governments have agreed to stop funding the development of coal-fired energy abroad, according to U.N. Secretary General António Guterres, who spoke during a news conference Monday.

“That spells catastrophe,” he said. The U.N. is urging those nations and others to not only halt investments in coal power abroad, but to dismantle their domestic systems at home as well. “Coal and other fossil fuels are choking humanity.”

	<p>This year world leaders will convene at the Group of 7 Leader's Summit slated to take place in Germany in June, the G20 Summit in Indonesia in October, and the U.N. Climate Change Conference — or COP27 — in Egypt in November.</p> <p>“Adaptation and mitigation must be pursued with equal force and urgency,” Guterres said. “Delay means death.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Police: still don't know how 2 teens died
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/going-in-circles-family-of-2-teens-found-dead-in-renton-apartment-waiting-for-answers/
GIST	<p>EVERETT — Betsy Alvarado finds it hard to focus on sweet memories of her two daughters when two months after their deaths she still has no answers.</p> <p>All over her Everett home are photos of Adriana and Mariel Gil smiling as young children and teenagers. Around her neck, Alvarado wears a heart-shaped locket inscribed with, “Adriana and Mariel, forever in our hearts.”</p> <p>Adriana and Mariel, 17 and 16 respectively, were found dead on Dec. 11 with their father, Manuel Gil, inside the Renton apartment they shared.</p> <p>Renton police said the girls appeared to have died on Dec. 5, while Gil likely died a day or so before the three bodies were found. There were no signs of carbon monoxide poisoning, no obvious indications of foul play, visible trauma or signs of a struggle, police have said.</p> <p>The King County Medical Examiner's Office conducted autopsies in mid-December, but was unable to determine a clear cause or manner of death, prompting further laboratory testing. The results are still pending.</p> <p>Detective Robert Onishi, who has worked with Renton police for 30 years, said he's never seen a case like this.</p> <p>“We're down to things like toxicology,” he said of efforts to determine a cause of death. “We don't have any clearer resolution than we had a month ago, or even a couple of months ago at this point.”</p> <p>The gap in days between estimated times of death for the sisters and their father leaves no doubt in Alvarado's mind that Gil, whom she ended a relationship with around 2007, had something to do with their daughters' deaths, she said.</p> <p>Without answers</p> <p>Neighbors had seen Gil packing items into a U-Haul a few weeks before Dec. 10, making Alvarado think he had left with the girls. But she had no way of knowing what was going on because her daughters and their father had cut off contact with other family members by then, she said.</p> <p>The night before the girls and their father were found, Alvarado had asked police several times to go into the apartment, but said she felt that there was no real urgency about the way officers responded.</p> <p>Police said they went to the apartment on Dec. 10, but it was locked. Officers did not go inside because they did not notice anything suspicious from the outside.</p> <p>The next morning, after learning police had been there, the landlord went inside the apartment and found the bodies.</p> <p>Alvarado said she felt frustrated and ignored after the deaths when her emails to police went unanswered for over a week several times.</p>

“I feel like I have no trust with the police,” she said. “I was ignored and I’m still being ignored.”

Onishi said the department has been as responsive as it can be under the circumstances. He said he, too, is frustrated with not being able to provide concrete answers to the family. He doesn’t see any way police can go beyond what they are doing now.

“There is not much to update the family on,” he said.

Adriana had been living with her father for about four or five years and Mariel had moved in with them a year and a half ago. Alvarado’s parenting plan with Gil only allowed him time with the girls every other weekend, but she says she felt powerless to seek to enforce it and did not have the means.

“If you don’t have thousands of dollars to go out and hire a lawyer to enforce your parenting plan, then you’re stuck,” Alvarado said. “You’re going in circles dealing with this. This is how it is for people that don’t have money.”

Concerning changes

Looking back, Alvarado said there were several red flags about the girls’ behavior that several organizations and agencies missed.

The girls’ school attendance was sporadic, but it’s unclear whether the school could have intervened or if it flagged their absences, said Renton police Detective Tracie Jarratt, who is assigned to the case. The Renton School District declined to comment, saying that it will defer to police since the case is still open.

On Nov. 1, Gil told the human resources department at the moving company where he worked “he needed to make things right with his maker” before abruptly quitting, his ex-wife told Alvarado.

Alvarado said she called Child Protective Services in April or May to report her concerns that the girls may have been abused and were malnourished after each lost about 50 pounds.

The state Department of Children, Youth, and Families looked into the report, but the agency did not send a referral to police for a follow-up because their investigation concluded that “the situation did not meet the threshold for assessment,” Jarratt said.

DCYF declined to comment on the case.

Alvarado said she believes Gil’s extreme religious beliefs led to her daughters’ growing distance from her. It was a gradual shift, she said, but the girls became malnourished and cut off contact with the outside world.

“People didn’t want to touch it. Nobody wants to get in trouble for messing with somebody’s religion, but now my kids are dead,” Alvarado said.

Alvarado said her daughters were followers of the Hebrew Israelite faith while she suspects their father was following an extremist sect of the Black Hebrew Israelite faith that is classified as a hate group by the Anti-Defamation League. The extremist sects are known for their belief that white people are agents of Satan, Jewish people are false worshippers of God and that Black people are racially superior and are the chosen people, according to the ADL.

“They just withdrew a lot,” Alvarado said. “They stopped finding joy in a lot of the stuff that they were into. Everything became worldly to them ... meaning it was wrong or meaningless.”

Giving up hobbies

Ron Anderson, the girls’ stepfather, remembers going to a play with Adriana and Mariel in which his youngest daughter was performing. As the room filled with laughter and applause, Adriana’s facial

expression remained stern, an unusual thing for the teen who would usually be loudly cheering her youngest sister, he said.

“I just thought that was the weirdest thing,” Anderson said.

Anderson had come into the girls’ lives when they were about 3 years old, shortly after they moved to Washington from New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Alvarado’s parents, Chris and Irma Amundson, helped raise the girls for a few years when they were younger and remember Adriana as always taking on the role of leader with Mariel right beside her like a “sidekick.”

They took the girls on several trips and vacations. Their favorite was taking the girls to Guatemala City, Guatemala, where Irma was born and raised, to meet family members and experience the culture and food.

But that was before the girls distanced themselves from the family, they said.

Mariel, who had a creative soul, gave up drawing because she felt she had sinned and had to atone for it, Alvarado said. She can’t recall what exactly had pushed her daughter to give up something she loved, but it was clear her biological father approved of it.

“Parents don’t do that for kids, no matter what they do,” Anderson said. “That was painful to hear.”

Adriana no longer played sports, not even basketball, which she loved and excelled at, Alvarado said.

The last time Alvarado spent time with the girls was in February 2021, when they went to a skating rink and then got pizza.

They had planned to go again, but then the girls canceled, telling Alvarado they couldn’t be “involved in all that worldly stuff.”

After that there was no more hanging out, Alvarado said, and the girls’ responses become shorter until they only replied with Bible scriptures and then not at all.

The girls no longer left the apartment and they cut everyone out of their lives including their grandparents, who were “their favorite people,” Alvarado said.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	02/28 Rise in fentanyl deaths spur tech solutions
SOURCE	https://www.geekwire.com/2022/its-just-astronomical-soaring-fentanyl-deaths-help-spur-tech-solutions-for-combating-the-opioid/
GIST	<p>Nationally, fentanyl-related overdoses are the leading cause of death for Americans age 18 to 45. The drug killed almost twice as many people in this age group compared to automobile crashes, the second-leading cause, in the year ending April 2021.</p> <p>Those impacts are reflected in law enforcement as well. The Seattle Police Department last year seized 10-times the number of fentanyl-based pills than were recovered the year before, according to news reports. Fentanyl use is threatening public safety, with drug users routinely smoking the opioid on buses and light-rail trains.</p>

Now [researchers at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory](#) are using sophisticated technologies to provide first responders and law enforcement better tools for recognizing fentanyl in its many variants. They're even predicting new forms that the shapeshifting drug might one day take.

Because just as the COVID-19 virus mutates into more infectious or dangerous versions of itself, illegal drug chemists are tweaking fentanyl's properties. The synthetic opioid can be made more potent, more addictive, easier to cut into other drugs, and harder to identify and detect. It's even possible to make it different enough to potentially duck its classification as a Schedule 1 or 2 drug, putting it in a legal gray area.

It's hard to say how many fentanyl variants have already been unleashed, but "it is easily in the dozens and varies by geographic location and over time," said [Rich Ozanich](#), a PNNL analytical chemist based in Richland, Wash.

"Some variants are more prevalent than others, but new ones can appear unexpectedly," Ozanich added, "and are sometimes only detected due to an overdose."

In 2015, three people who overdosed in Seattle's King County had fentanyl in their systems. Six years later, that number has spiked more than 100-fold, with the opioid present in 382 deaths in the county last year.

"It's just astronomical," said [Brad Finegood](#), a strategic advisor for Public Health – Seattle and King County.

Building a drug library

Ingredients for the opioids are often made in China and manufactured into fentanyl in Mexico, experts say, then smuggled into the U.S. Fentanyl initially arrived in the greater Seattle area masquerading primarily as pain pills like Percocet and OxyContin. In other regions it was more commonly mixed with heroine or methamphetamine. It can be added to counterfeit Xanax and Adderall.

Now it's being sought by drug users as fentanyl itself.

The opioid is produced and used legally to treat severe cancer pain. It's roughly [50 times](#) more powerful than heroine. It's swallowed as a pill or smoked, lowering the bar for experimentation for people who balk at injecting drugs. It can be deadly in grain-of-salt-sized amounts, is relatively inexpensive and it's increasingly killing kids, as well as people of all ages in urban and rural settings.

"It's super duper scary," said Finegood, an expert in addiction issues. "We're doing everything in our power to get ahead of this."

It's not easy. When public health officials are combating heroine, drug users come in for free, clean needles, providing an opportunity to talk about addiction treatment and other resources. That doesn't happen with fentanyl. Instead, Finegood's agency is using social media as a primary tool for education and outreach. A recent campaign had 13 million imprints.

The work at PNNL requires more advanced technologies.

Medics, police and other front-line workers responding to an overdose or crime scene can face unidentified substances that pose unknown threats. They use costly, mobile chemical detection devices to analyze the substances. But they're limited by the device's onboard database or "library" of known chemicals. With fentanyl, criminals keep adding unfamiliar volumes.

So the PNNL researchers built a library of 50 fentanyl variants, which is being shared for free with the 14 device manufacturers. By this summer, the companies' 21 different devices — including those already out in the field — should be updated with the new information.

Then the researchers are doing a sort of Consumer Reports evaluation of the devices, said Ozanich, who is leading the work. The team will test the devices against fentanyl that's mixed in 70 different combinations as it might be found on the street. That includes mixing it with other illegal drugs, laxatives and acetaminophen that are added to treat fentanyl's side effects, and other substances.

The detection devices can cost \$50,000 or more and use technologies including analysis of the light reflected by the chemicals, test strips and by "sniffing" the air near a chemical.

The PNNL work is being funded by the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate.

Predicting new threats

Another PNNL team is trying to get a step ahead of the drug dealers, predicting new fentanyl variants before they exist.

Kabrena Rodda, a PNNL senior scientist who leads multiple projects focused on chemical threats, estimates that there are millions of potential fentanyl analogues. The researchers are using computational chemistry and databases describing the metabolic and pharmacological effects of different drugs in order to predict the most likely variants.

The predictive technology will ultimately be applicable to other drugs and chemicals of concern.

For those working to beat back the fentanyl plague, it can feel like a battle that isn't going so well. Rodda thinks her group's work can provide some hope.

"Without some of these more predictive tools, I think it could feel very defeating," she said. "The more quickly we're able to respond [with law enforcement], then perhaps that leads to a world where the people who do this work decide it's not worth it."

It will still be a couple of years before information on the predicted fentanyl variants will become a tool for first responders and law enforcement.

But Rodda, Ozanich and Finegood emphasized the importance of staying on top of the evolving threat.

"We're keeping our finger on the pulse," Finegood said.

"If we see a new drug or new drug trend that comes up, whether it's drugs coming in different substances or a new drug that we haven't seen before, we want to let the community know," he said, "because that's a big risk."

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HEADLINE	03/01 Europol busts migrant smugglers gang
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/euro-police-bust-gang-smugglers/
GIST	<p>European police are claiming another win after busting a suspected cybercrime gang that used the dark web to distribute counterfeit ID documents for migrant smugglers.</p> <p>An investigation by the French Border Police and Spanish National Police, supported by Europol, led to six house searches and 17 arrests – three in France and 14 in Spain.</p> <p>During the raids, police seized computers, smartphones, storage devices, counterfeit and genuine ID documents and photocopies of ID documents, labor certificates, administrative documents, payment cards and cash.</p> <p>The organized crime network distributed forged ID and travel documents in France, Germany, Italy and Spain, according to Europol.</p>

	<p>“The documents were used by other criminals involved in the smuggling of migrants to the US, the UK and Ireland and other criminal activities (such as property crimes, trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking),” it said.</p> <p>“The criminal network was directly involved in migrant smuggling activities and logistical arrangements in return for payments starting at €8000 (\$9000) per person.”</p> <p>Members of the gang, who are said mainly to come from Eastern Europe, apparently also operated in Georgia and Lithuania.</p> <p>They mainly used dark web channels to distribute the fake documents, focusing on French, Romanian, Georgian, Lithuanian and Polish IDs, according to Europol. However, instant messaging apps and even postal services were also used to get the docs to their intended recipients.</p> <p>Messaging apps, presumably encrypted ones, were also used by the group to collaborate and exchange images of documents, vehicles and money transfer slips. Europol analysts said they linked some of this information to other ongoing investigations.</p> <p>Migrant smuggling is a critical area of concern for Europol. Back in October, it signed a working agreement with the UK’s National Crime Agency (NCA) designed to formalize cooperation on this and other serious and organized crimes.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Drug cartel massacre video; bodies missing
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/mexico-men-disappeared-drug-cartel
GIST	<p>Mexicans have been left wondering what happened to about a dozen men who disappeared after they were seen lined up against a wall by drug cartel gunmen.</p> <p>In a video apparently filmed by a resident of the town San José de Gracia in the western state of Michoacán and posted on social media, bursts of gunfire broke out and smoke covered the scene.</p> <p>The camera cuts away, and most observers assumed all the men – perhaps as many as 17 – died.</p> <p>But prosecutors said Monday that they cannot say how many were killed, because the attackers cleaned up the scene, washed the sidewalk and carted away any bodies. Investigators found only a bag full of brains and shell casings at the scene.</p> <p>The attack on Sunday occurred outside a funeral service for the mother of an alleged hitman for the Jalisco New Generation cartel. Jalisco has been fighting long-running, bloody turf battles in Michoacán against the rival Viagras gang, also known as the United Cartels.</p> <p>The chief prosecutor of Michoacán state said members of the rival gang went to the funeral looking for the hitman, who authorities identified only by his first name, Alejandro.</p> <p>State prosecutor Adrián López Solís said that the hitman apparently died at the scene and that any other bodies were piled into pickup trucks and carted off by the attackers. Other videos posted on social media showed two or three bodies tossed into a pickup truck.</p> <p>López Solís said the attack occurred only a few blocks from the town hall, where three local police officers were on duty. He said the police neither went to the scene nor sounded an alarm, contending that “they didn’t have sufficient force” to intervene.</p> <p>Local police in Mexico are often out-gunned and out-numbered by cartel gunmen.</p> <p>There have been a string of recent attacks at funerals in Mexico, as cartel gunmen seek to exterminate members of rival gangs who attend the services.</p>

	<p>Jorge Luis Anguiano, the mayor whose township includes San José de Gracia, said that before the attack a large convoy of vehicles was seen entering from neighboring Jalisco state, home to the cartel of the same name. He said local police didn't have the firepower to intervene.</p> <p>"Seeing the number of presumed criminals that were there and given the rules of engagement, we had to retreat," Anguiano said. "We do not have the firepower to handle this type of situations.</p> <p>"In situations like this, municipal governments are left exposed," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Man kills own 3 kids, adult at church
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/28/us/church-shooting-sacramento.html
GIST	<p>A man believed to be meeting his three children for a supervised visit at a church just outside Sacramento on Monday afternoon fatally shot the children and an adult accompanying them before killing himself, police officials said.</p> <p>Sheriff Scott Jones of Sacramento County told reporters at the scene that the gunman had a restraining order against him, and that he had to have supervised visits with his children, who were younger than 15.</p> <p>The sheriff said that the mother of the children was safe and had been contacted by the authorities after the shooting.</p> <p>"This is, as far as I can see, at this point a domestic-violence-related sort of incident," Sgt. Rod Grassmann, a spokesman for the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office, told reporters at an earlier news conference.</p> <p>Somebody else who was in the building called the authorities after hearing gunshots around 5 p.m., Sergeant Grassmann said.</p> <p>"There will be a lot of physical evidence that needs to be collected," the sergeant said. "You can count on that we will be out here for the night."</p> <p>It was unclear how many other people were at the church or why they were there, he said. The church had been holding its weekly services online because of the coronavirus pandemic, according to its website.</p> <p>The church, which lists phone numbers for English, Chinese and Spanish speakers, is just east of the city, in a densely populated suburban area. It appears to be nondenominational and calls itself "the church in Sacramento."</p> <p>Sean Loloe, the City Council member who represents the region near the church, said the neighborhood was multicultural and blue-collar, with a mix of older people, families and first-time home buyers.</p> <p>Gov. Gavin Newsom of California said on Twitter that the shooting was "another senseless act of gun violence in America."</p> <p>"This time in our backyard," he said. "In a church with kids inside. Absolutely devastating. Our hearts go out to the victims, their families and their communities."</p> <p>Mayor Darrell Steinberg said in a statement that the shooting was "an unspeakable tragedy."</p> <p>"It happens too often, and tonight it happened in our backyard," he said. "First thoughts are with the victims and their families. Same to the first responders who have to confront such a horrible scene."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 Mayor, businesses address 3 rd Ave. safety
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattle-mayor-businesses-address-third-avenue-safety/281-e5108d08-df29-4ae4-8936-f151da779739
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Along Third Avenue in downtown Seattle, businesses say safety concerns have grown over the last two years.</p> <p>At The Triple Door, a live music venue, employees were adding more boards to the building Monday afternoon. Inside, buckets with broken glass sat on the floor next to a rock that someone hurled at a window.</p> <p>Owner Rick Yoder said it happened overnight. He adds that it is the fourth break-in at his business in the last two years.</p> <p>On Sunday afternoon, down the street at Third Avenue and Pine, a man was shot and killed.</p> <p>"It is just a travesty for the city," Yoder said.</p> <p>After the weekend's deadly shooting, the owner of Piroshky Piroshky said she is closing her Third Avenue location for now because of safety concerns.</p> <p>On Yoder's block, he said other businesses have done the same.</p> <p>"It is vacant from here north," Yoder said. "This is the transit center for the whole city. Pike Place Market is the largest public attraction. We need help."</p> <p>Mayor Bruce Harrell called the situation along Third Avenue "completely unacceptable." He said for those struggling on the streets, the city is working to provide services. But the mayor also wants accountability for crimes committed along the corridor.</p> <p>"We need to protect the people in our city from people who are committing atrocious acts, and so our booking policies will reflect that and those are my discussions that I'm having with those who run the criminal systems there," said Harrell about the King County Correctional Facility.</p> <p>"Everybody's saying the right things, and I am seeing some progress, but we got a long way to go," Yoder said.</p> <p>The violence, thefts, and daily drug deals have overwhelmed downtown, but after being on the corner of Third and Union for 22-years, Yoder refuses to pack up and leave.</p> <p>"We feel we are an important and integral part, a legacy part of the city, and we are going to hold our ground," Yoder said.</p> <p>Part of Mayor Harrell's plan involves addressing police staffing shortages. He wants to have approximately 1,400 officers. Right now, the city has fewer than 1,000.</p> <p>City Attorney Ann Davison released a statement on Monday about the crime along Third Avenue, that says, in part, "the situation on Third Avenue is intolerable for our city. It's not possible to run a business, commuters feel unsafe taking the bus to get to work, all the while people engaged in what has become an open-air drug market are not receiving significant or effective intervention of their criminal activity. As I have done with referrals from 12th and Jackson, I will prioritize Seattle Police Department referrals from this high-crime hot spot on Third Avenue."</p> <p>King County Regional Homelessness Authority is putting a focus on helping people in downtown Seattle who need resources and housing. A new partnership could shelter most of the people experiencing homelessness downtown in as little as 12 months, according to Marc Dones, CEO of the homelessness authority.</p>

HEADLINE	02/28 Longtime problems at Seattle's 3 rd & Pine
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/weve-been-here-before-fatal-shooting-underscores-longtime-problems-at-seattles-third-and-pine/
GIST	<p>Leslie Buker and a small group of her neighbors were having brunch Sunday to discuss safety issues on Third Avenue when they heard the pop-pop-pop of gunfire. One of the attendees didn't even get up from the table to look out the window.</p> <p>Two hours later, Buker was walking on the east side of Third, outside the old Macy's building, and saw a man's body covered with a sheet on the sidewalk.</p> <p>Buker, who lives in a condo building on Third Avenue midway between Pike and Pine streets, said that during investigations into previous fatal shootings in the area, police have closed Third Avenue to traffic, forcing buses along the busy corridor to be rerouted.</p> <p>She said that didn't happen on Sunday, when a 52-year-old man was gunned down just before 12:30 p.m. outside the McDonald's at Third and Pine. As of Monday, police had made no arrests and the man's name had not yet been released by the King County Medical Examiner's Office.</p> <p>"It seemed like it was no big deal. The attitude seemed so different this time," Buker, 38, said of the fourth homicide in as many years to occur outside her front door. "It's also becoming a lot less unnerving. It's becoming a lot more normal."</p> <p>Olga Sagan had similar sentiment Sunday about the increase in crime in the neighborhood. The shooting happened not far from her Piroshky Piroshky bakery, prompting her to shutter her doors out of concern for her employees and customers.</p> <p>Buker and others who live or work near the 1500 block of Third Avenue said Monday that the area has seen an influx of drug users since Seattle police cleared out an open-air drug market in Seattle's Little Saigon neighborhood a little over a week ago. People openly hawk stolen goods on sidewalks crowded with drug users and dealers.</p> <p>But the intersection and surrounding streets have a troubling history dating back decades, with various administrations and police chiefs targeting the open-air drug market in the area locally known as The Blade with varying degrees of success.</p> <p>On Monday, private security officers who patrol Third Avenue described an uptick in visible crime on the sidewalk since the police operation in Little Saigon. Daily, they say there are more illegal resales of liquor and merchandise, more fights and more people who are "loyal to the foil," those who heat fentanyl pills on bits of tin foil and suck in the smoke through straws.</p> <p>"It's not our job to protect them or to protect anyone but the buildings we work for," said Sam King, a security guard for the Market at Century Square, moments after a nonbloody knife fight broke out between two men just feet from the building.</p> <p>"It needs to be safer," King added. "We just can't do anything about it and keep having to watch it get worse."</p> <p>Three weeks before Sunday's homicide, Mayor Bruce Harrell said that he would "not tolerate" crime in Seattle, committing his administration to addressing street safety, with an emphasis on certain high-crime areas.</p> <p>At the time, Harrell said he was directing Seattle police to address a list of areas with distinctly high crime rates, starting with the efforts in Little Saigon. Police made 23 felony arrests and 14 misdemeanor</p>

arrests in the first 21 days of January, recovered stolen property 24 times, and had over 100 interactions with business owners, patrons and residents, according to the mayor's office.

On Monday, Senior Deputy Mayor Monisha Harrell confirmed that Third Avenue is on the list for similar enforcement. She said the strategy includes a consistent law enforcement presence, with an emphasis on making felony arrests, and bringing "positive energy" and "positive attention" to the area by renewing business presence and foot traffic, which has been missing, in part, due to the pandemic.

"It's not just about the policing part of safety, but it's also about environmental solutions that will include ways to revitalize the area," Monisha Harrell said.

It's a similar strategy to what's been tried before.

In 2015, for instance, bus stops were moved, alleys restricted and newspaper boxes used by drug dealers removed as part of the Police Department's "9½ Block Strategy," focused on a small section of downtown between First and Fourth avenues and Union and Stewart streets. More than 100 people were arrested during the undercover operation.

Though the open-air drug market was momentarily disrupted, it was never completely quashed. During the pandemic, tents flourished downtown for a time as the downtown core was emptied of office workers, commuters and tourists. Even now, only 33% of downtown workers have returned to their offices and foot traffic has rebounded to 75% of what it was pre-pandemic, according to [data from the Downtown Seattle Association](#).

Businesses, too, have been moving out, with Piroshky Piroshky the latest casualty of the area's violence. In the past year alone, 19 brick-and-mortar retailers or restaurants closed on Third, including a busy Starbucks, The Seattle Times' Jon Talton [wrote in early February](#). Other closings since early 2020 include such major retailers as Bed Bath & Beyond, Bergman Luggage, Macy's, Columbia Sportswear, T.J. Maxx, IGA Kress grocery and Bartell Drugs.

"It's sad. This location was great for business a couple of years ago, but we just can't have our people in here right now," Piroshky Piroshky owner Sagan, who has been [asking city leaders to address crime on Third for months](#), said Monday while an employee cleaned the store to prepare for the closure.

"We're still leased to be here and we're going to reassign our employees while we're gone, and we want to reopen," Sagan said. "I just don't know how long it will be and we're not coming back until it's safe."

A week before Sunday's homicide, on Feb. 21, a 48-year-old man was critically injured after being shot in the face at Third and Pine, [according to police](#). A couple of days before that, Buker said she performed CPR on a woman who overdosed and was given Narcan before medics transported her to the hospital.

In January 2020, a shootout between rival gang members at Third and Pine killed one woman and injured six other people. Two men, Marquise Tolbert and William Toliver, await trial for first-degree murder and six counts of first-degree assault.

"Third & Pine is an area where known gang members, particularly those from the Central District ... gathered, sold narcotics and engaged in other criminal activity," King County Senior Deputy Prosecutor Brandy Gevers wrote in a February motion seeking to have a gang expert testify at the men's trial.

Detective Patrick Michaud, a Seattle police spokesman, said so much crime has been centered on Third and Pine because it can be hidden in plain sight with so many people going about their business and coming in and out of the downtown core.

	<p>“It’s as simple as where there are groups of people, there’s crime. It can be hidden and people take advantage of that,” he said.</p> <p>As for the open drug use in the area, Michaud said police can sometimes make arrests for possession of illegal drugs but it depends on how much someone has on them when they’re contacted by officers.</p> <p>“It’s not illegal to be high in the city of Seattle,” he said, and if officers catch someone after they’ve ingested narcotics, “we’ll get them medical help if they need it but the crime has stopped because there’s no longer possession.”</p> <p>Councilmember Andrew Lewis, whose district includes the downtown core, said Monday he has been working with the mayor’s office on addressing downtown crime, but thinks the city needs a broad and consistent approach.</p> <p>“We’ve been here before,” Lewis said, referencing Sunday’s fatal shooting. “We do know that Third Avenue has — since long before the pandemic — hosted a general climate that makes things like this happen over and over.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/28 ICC to open Ukraine war crimes probe
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/icc-prosecutor-open-probe-war-crimes-ukraine-83163937
GIST	<p>THE HAGUE, Netherlands -- The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said Monday he plans to open an investigation “as rapidly as possible” into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine.</p> <p>Prosecutor Karim Khan said in a statement that the investigation will look at alleged crimes committed before the Russian invasion, but added that “given the expansion of the conflict in recent days, it is my intention that this investigation will also encompass any new alleged crimes falling within the jurisdiction of my office that are committed by any party to the conflict on any part of the territory of Ukraine.”</p> <p>The court already has conducted a preliminary probe into crimes linked to the violent suppression of pro-European protests in Kyiv in 2013-2014 by a pro-Russian Ukrainian administration and allegations of crimes in Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, and eastern Ukraine, where Russia has backed rebels since 2014.</p> <p>In December 2020, then-ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said the probe uncovered indications that “a broad range of conduct constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity within the jurisdiction of the Court have been committed” in Ukraine. However, the court’s prosecutors had not yet sought permission from judges to open a full-scale investigation.</p> <p>Khan says he now wants to open the investigation envisaged by his predecessor and broaden it to include crimes committed in fighting since the Russian invasion of Ukraine last week.</p> <p>Khan said he would continue to monitor developments in Ukraine, where there have been reports of civilian casualties, and he called for “restraint and strict adherence to the applicable rules of international humanitarian law.”</p> <p>U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet says her office has confirmed that 102 civilians, including seven children, have been killed in the Russian invasion and 304 others wounded in Ukraine since Thursday. She cautioned that the tally was likely a vast undercount.</p> <p>Neither Russia nor Ukraine is among the court’s 123 member states, but Ukraine has accepted the court’s jurisdiction, which empowers Khan to investigate.</p> <p>Khan has told his team to explore how to preserve evidence of crimes and said that the next step is to seek authorization from the court’s judges to open an investigation. However, he added that the process would</p>

	<p>be speeded up if a member nation of the court were to ask for an investigation in what is known as a referral.</p> <p>That “would allow us to actively and immediately proceed with the (prosecution) Office’s independent and objective investigations,” Khan said.</p> <p>He said he also would seek support from the court’s member states and the international community to fund the investigation.</p> <p>“I will be calling for additional budgetary support, for voluntary contributions to support all our situations, and for the loan of gratis personnel,” he said. “The importance and urgency of our mission is too serious to be held hostage to lack of means.”</p>
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